



LIVED EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, COPING STRATEGIES, AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES OF FILIPINO TEACHERS TEACHING ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

The study determined the lived experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and job opportunities of Filipino teachers teaching abroad for the school year 2022-2023. The interview with the participants was done through Google Meet and Zoom. The participants of the study were twenty (20) teachers from selected countries, five (5) from the USA, five (5) from Bahrain, five (5) from Thailand, and five (5) from Singapore. It was found out that their lived experiences revolve around these themes: In search for greener pastures, living away from home, living conditions, and educational settings. The challenges experienced by the teachers teaching abroad include emotional challenges, cultural challenges, language barriers, and psychological and work-related challenges. The coping strategies of the participants include recreational activities, rest and sleep strategy, developed a support group, educating one-self, professional development, and mentorship. The job opportunities they mentioned during the interview include tutoring, coaching, online teaching, and professional growth with stipend.

Keywords: *Lived Experiences, Job Opportunities, Filipino Teachers Teaching Abroad*

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching is considered to be the mother of all professions. No learner becomes successful professionals without the sacrifice, dedication, and wisdom of a good teacher.

Among the teachers all around the world, Filipino teachers are some of the most highly-rated professionals because of their academic competence, exceptional work ethic, and impeccable use of the English language (Cañedo, 2014). Because of this, there is a continuous upward trend in the demand for Filipino teachers abroad (Novio, 2022).

Teaching abroad offers numerous advantages such as higher salaries, opportunities for advanced studies and promotion, and immersion in new cultures (Gamlan as cited by Victoria et al., 2018). However, a number of disadvantages were identified such as the deskilling of the best and brightest Filipino teachers (Cruz, Tan, & Yonaha, 2015).

Based on OFW Guide (2019), some of the countries that offer teaching jobs to Filipinos include those in Asia: China, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. Further, western countries like the United States of America and New Zealand also hire competent Filipino teachers.

A survey in 2019 by the Overseas Filipinos by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reports that the Philippines has been deploying an average of 1,500 teachers worldwide every year.

Filipino teachers are paid 10 times their salaries in the Philippines. Because of this, Filipino teachers pursued careers overseas. As a result, the Philippines is losing many of its scientists, mathematicians, linguists, and other experts (Ubalde, 2007).

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Filipino teachers' experiences are a rich tapestry of unique stories that narrate both the advantages and disadvantages of teaching abroad especially during the new normal school year (GMA network, 2021). These stories either provide a cautionary or an inspiring tale to future teacher applicants.

Serbes (2017) identified academic and social developments as two of the most identifiable advantages. Through their international exposure, Filipino teachers have the opportunity to develop their teaching, communication, and classroom management skills. Further, because teachers immerse in a new speech community, they have the opportunity to learn new languages and other cultures. With this, teaching internationally broadens teachers' efficiency and effectiveness especially in dealing with multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

Most of the teachers who are leaving the Philippines to teach abroad were usually employed in the Department of Education (DepEd) or in private institutions in the country. The researcher, who was a DepEd employee and now working as a teacher abroad, learned first hand how it is to teach abroad. The study sought to delve into the lived experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and job opportunities of other Filipino teachers' teaching abroad. It was hoped that through their stories, future applicants would be properly guided to the realities they will experience if they pursue their dreams to teach abroad.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Method

The research method used in the study was a descriptive qualitative research method using in-depth interviews to gather data. According to Creswell (2013) in-depth interviews involve direct, one-on-one engagement with individual participants. It can be done face-to-face, or in some cases over the phone or through online teleconferencing tools. The goal of in-depth interviews is to uncover information or experiences unique to each participant as well those that are common to all participants. It may also seek to look into the views of the participants on a given topic or topics.

Research Design

The study used qualitative research design using phenomenology. Phenomenology is a study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first person point of view (Smith, 2018). Neubauer (2019) also added that phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the importance of understanding the daily lived experiences of a person within the world.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were selected purposively and identified Filipino teachers teaching in Thailand, Bahrain, Singapore, and United States of America for the school year

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2022-2023. Five teachers teaching either in Elementary or High School, public, private or charter schools from each country were chosen with a total of 20 participants.

Sampling Design

Purposive sampling design was used in the study. This type of sampling technique relies on the researcher's judgment in choosing participants from a given population. According to Black (2010), the researcher may rely on his or her sound judgment in choosing a representative sample. By doing this, the researcher may save time, money, and effort (Black, 2010).

Research Instrument

For the study, the researcher utilized a research instrument which is an interview schedule specifically designed to gather the necessary data. The interview schedule was created to address the goals set by the researcher as specified by the Statement of the Problem.

To gather and document the needed data, the researcher used a voice and video recorder with permission from the participants. Given that the participants were in different locations around the world, the researcher decided to use Google Meet or Zoom during the conduct of the interview, the latter was recorded with permission from the participants. Interview notes were used for transcription of the interview for the analysis.

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Validity of the Research Instrument

First, the interview schedule was submitted for review and modification by the adviser. Next, the instrument was submitted to a panel of experts to ensure each item was valid in terms of content. The panel of experts included three jurors whose expertise lie in the field of research, testing and assessment, and English. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2007), if a researcher seeks to validate his or her instrument, what shall be checked shall be the appropriateness, meaningfulness, correctness, and usefulness of inferences that a researcher makes. In content-related evidence of validity, the content and format must be consistent with the definition of variables and sample of subject to be measured and is also helpful in validating the items in the questionnaire.

Comments, corrections, and suggestions of the panel of validators regarding the items in the interview schedule were considered and incorporated to come up with the final interview schedule.

Data Gathering Procedures

All permits from the adviser, Dean of the Graduate School, and especially from the individual participants were obtained to allow the researcher to conduct the study. Participants were informed about the study and their consent to be part of it. After they agreed, their email addresses were asked, and the researcher scheduled a video call interview using Zoom or Google Meet to the availability and convenience of the participants.

The video call interview was recorded to completely capture the interviewee's responses. The participants were informed that the interview was recorded prior to the formal

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question and answer proper. The objective was to get the participants' views and experiences related to the purposes of the study. The researcher consolidated, summarized and transcribed all collected information after all interviews were done.

Data Analyses

The information gathered was analyzed using a thematic approach.

According to Caulfiend (2019), thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data which may include texts such as interview transcripts. After obtaining the data, the researcher reads and rereads the transcripts until common themes or patterns emerge.

Further, Maguire and Delahunt (2017) clarify that thematic analysis involves identifying important and interesting themes and patterns in the data, summarizing and analyzing them, and making sense of these data in relation to the research questions at hand.

In the study, interesting and important recurring themes from the recorded data were synthesized, discussed, and analyzed. With this, the researcher looked into the recurring themes under the following major topics: profile of the participants, their lived experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and opportunities in teaching abroad. Then, the recurring themes were categorized, discussed further, and substantiated by extracts coming from the recorded interviews. Existing related studies were also discussed alongside the results of the study for comparison.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study aimed to determine the lived experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and job opportunities of Filipino teachers teaching abroad for the school year 2022-2023.

The research method utilized in the study was a qualitative method using in-depth interviews and the research design was phenomenology.

The interview with the participants was done through Google Meet and Zoom. The goal of the interview was to unravel the lived experiences, challenges encountered and job opportunities of teachers teaching abroad.

The participants of the study were twenty (20) teachers from selected countries, five (5) from the USA, five (5) from Bahrain, five (5) from Thailand, and five (5) from Singapore. These participants were selected after a survey was conducted by the researcher with the utmost willingness from the participants.

In the study, the researcher used an interview schedule to gather the needed data. Tools used in data gathering include voice and video recorders, the use of which varies depending upon the preference of the participants.

Prior to implementation, a panel of experts validated the interview schedule. All comments and suggestions were considered and incorporated prior to finalizing the instrument.

Permits from the adviser, Dean of the graduate School, School Administrators from different international schools and individual participants were obtained to allow the researcher to conduct the study.

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The researcher consolidated all collected data after the series of interviews. The information gathered was analyzed and interpreted using a thematic approach.

The following are the findings of the study:

Based on the information gathered during the in-depth interview with the participants, it was found out that their lived experiences revolve around these themes: In search for greener pasture, leaving away from home, living conditions, and educational settings.

It was also found out that there were different challenges experienced by the participants teaching abroad. These were: emotional challenges, cultural challenges, language barriers, and psychological and work-related challenges.

Based on the information gathered during the interview with the participants, it was found out that the coping strategies of the participants include recreational activities, rest and sleep strategy, developed a support group, educating one-self, professional development, and mentorship.

The job opportunities they mentioned during the interview include tutoring, coaching, online teaching, and professional development with stipend.

Based on the findings, the following insights were drawn:

Teachers' decisions to teach abroad are influenced by a variety of factors. These factors include seeking greener pastures to improve their standard of living, support their families better, for a change, adventure, and career advancement. Therefore, there are many advantages that a Filipino teacher can gain when working abroad, which when adapted in the Philippines may convince these teachers to stay.

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Teaching in a foreign country is a desirable career path for many teachers because of the exposures it provides. Filipino teachers who work abroad also have lots of good benefits like personal and professional growth, competitive compensation packages, access to free and better healthcare, opportunities to have additional income aside from their salaries by doing tutorials, after school assignments, coaching, online teaching, and teaching in summer classes and summer camps.

Teaching abroad can be challenging but at the same time rewarding because of monetary compensation, better educational settings with access to advanced technologies, variety of teaching resources and supportive and caring administration.

Adjusting to a new working environment may be tough and demanding. There were also cultural challenges such as emotional and cultural challenges, language barriers brought about by their students' differences in English speaking proficiency level, diverse language orientations, and religious beliefs. Teachers also became willing victims to psychological problems such as burnouts and depression due to work-related- pressures.

Cultural shock may be challenging, but transcending cultural barriers and appreciating diverse cultures can also be enriching and fun. Acquiring new experiences abroad can help a person to evolve and unravel a career path and achieve professional advancement in the international arena.

Teaching abroad is not easy, there are a lot of challenges one may encounter but it is all up for any teacher who wishes to work abroad on how to deal with these challenges and prove victorious against all odds.

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There are many job opportunities abroad but it all depends on the teacher, how she or he manages his or her time, priorities in life, coping styles, linkages with others, and support system.

Despite these challenges, many Filipino teachers become victorious in their career and find their work rewarding. The risk of leaving the comfort of teaching at their home country is worth it.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and insights, the following are recommended:

First, a mental health care seminar on how to deal with loneliness and homesickness can be given to teachers working abroad in order to deal with mental health and other issues.

Second, a professional training on basic communication skills and language acquisition can help address the challenges brought about by language barriers. By having basic training, teachers planning to work abroad can effectively communicate to the learners and parents as well.

Third, a training course on cultural relativism can help address culture shock and foster cultural understanding and appreciation.

Fourth, develop, organize or join recreational and wellness activities or hobbies to help maintain work-life balance, promote well-being and stay fit.

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Lastly, classroom management, teaching strategies and teacher support training should be provided to teachers' prior their deployment abroad so that teachers can adapt to the varied and effective teaching strategies abroad.

A similar study is recommended to be conducted in the future and consider other variables not used nor mentioned in the study. It is also recommended that a similar study can be conducted in other parts of the world aside from the countries mentioned in the study.



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