

## Living and Teaching Internationally: Teachers' Experiences, Prospects and Challenges

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### Abstract

One of the primary challenges Filipino teachers face in the United States is the adjustment to a new culture. The adjustment process can be overwhelming, and the teachers may face cultural shock and feel isolated as they navigate the American education system. Working in a different culture can also provide Filipino teachers with opportunities for professional growth and development. Thus, the researcher wanted to learn more about the challenges faced by Filipino international teachers in the United States and how they dealt with them. This study aimed to explore and determine Filipino teachers' experiences, coping strategies, and challenges living and teaching internationally. This study utilized qualitative research to design a term for various approaches to and methods of analyzing natural social life. The study's participants were the ten (10) Filipino teachers currently living and teaching in the United States of America, specifically in Arizona. They are a J1 or H1B visa holder. Three (3) male and seven (7) female informants participated in the study. This study employed a semi-structured interview to gather pertinent information from the participants. Thematic analysis is a research method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. In this qualitative study, the researcher utilized in-depth interviews using open-ended questions as primary tools for data collection. From the interview of ten participants, their experiences gave way to four emerging themes with 11 subthemes, which showed how they struggled, coped, learned, and planned as they stayed in Arizona, USA. Filipino educators frequently encounter opportunities abroad that come with challenges they must overcome. Adapting to a new situation is only sometimes straightforward, which presents obstacles for these educators.

**Keywords:** challenges, experiences, J1/H1B Visas, prospects

### Introduction

Many professionals, including educators, have left the Philippines in recent years in search of better employment opportunities elsewhere. Several factors in the social, economic, and political spheres have contributed to this shift (Ospina & Medina, 2020). The high unemployment rate, low wages, high inflation, and civil unrest in the Philippines have caused many teachers to leave the country in search of better economic and living conditions (Berger, 2021). Kerr et al. (2016) report a dramatic increase in the number of professionals migrating abroad, underscoring the importance of this trend.

Teaching in a foreign country is a desirable career path for many teachers because of the exposure it provides to new countries and cultures (Hauerwas, Skawinski, & Ryan, 2017). Some people decide to become international educators so that they can travel, experience new cultures, and develop personally and professionally (Cross & Dunn, 2016; Hauerwas, Skawinski, & Ryan, 2017). Cultural gaps are narrowing, however, making it harder for international teachers to successfully adapt to their new environment (Berger, 2021).

The researchers wanted to learn more about the challenges faced by Filipino international teachers in the United States and how they dealt with them. This research has the potential to shed light on the specific

experiences and difficulties faced by international educators, thus adding to the growing body of literature on intercultural development as a result of globalization. Furthermore, this research will aid in comprehending the future implications of the current lifestyle and pedagogical paradigm of Filipino international educators.

This study aimed to explore and determine Filipino teachers' experiences, coping strategies, and challenges living and teaching internationally.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What personal experiences have they had as teachers while living and teaching in the United States?
2. How do they cope with the challenges of living and teaching in the United States, and what strategies or methods have they found effective for growing their career as teachers while in the United States?
3. What are some of the most difficult challenges they have encountered while living and teaching in the United States, and how did they overcome them?

### Methods

This section of the article describes the research design, the methods for collecting the data, the procedures for scoring and interpreting the data, and the ethical guidelines that must be adhered to in order for the results to be trusted.

### Research Design

This study utilized qualitative research design, a term for various approaches to and methods of analyzing natural social life (Saldaña, 2011). Qualitative research is a methodological approach that aims to understand complex social phenomena by exploring and interpreting individuals' experiences, behaviors, and beliefs (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the phenomenological qualitative research approach sought to uncover the essence of participants' experiences in a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The justification for using this approach was based on the need to understand the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by teachers who live and work in international contexts. Hence, the study aimed to explore how international teaching experiences affect teachers' personal and professional lives and how they navigate the challenges and opportunities of working in a foreign environment.

### Participants of the study

The participants of the study were the ten (10) Filipino teachers currently living and teaching in the United States of America, specifically in Arizona. They are a J1 or H1B visa holder. There were three (3) male and seven (7) female informants participated in the study. Creswell (2013) suggests a number of guidelines for selecting research participants in qualitative studies. The first step is to seek out individuals who have firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. Second, participants must be able to describe in detail their observations, interpretations, and feelings about the phenomenon. Third, a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences is required within the group. Finally, Creswell emphasizes the importance of research participants being available for interviews and capable of providing comprehensive, self-reflective responses (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, according to the principles of qualitative research, sample sizes shouldn't be too small to make it difficult to achieve data saturation or informational redundancy or too large to make it challenging to conduct in-depth analysis (Sandelowski, 1995). Further, in ensuring that only the most willing and appropriate participants were included in this study, the researcher used a rigorous process of purposeful sampling with an emphasis on criterion sampling to select them. Criterion sampling, as described by Creswell (2014), is an efficient method for interviewing people who have firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon being studied.

**Table 1. Profile of Filipino Teachers Living and Teaching in the U.S**

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Civil Status	Grade Level Taught	Years in US	School
Gener	Female	55	Married	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	4 years	Seven Mile Elementary

Enggilbert	Male	35	Single	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	8 months	Cradleboard Elementary
Bar	Male	32	Married	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	7 months	Cradleboard Elementary
Ledijud	Male	30	Single	7 <sup>th</sup> /8 <sup>th</sup>	2 years	Canyon Day Jr. High
Bandy	Female	38	Single	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1 year and 7 months	Seven Mile Elementary
Jannez	Female		Widowed	3 <sup>rd</sup>	7 months	Seven Mile Elementary
Liscioco	Female	56	Widowed	9 <sup>th</sup> /10 <sup>th</sup>	2 years	Alchesay High School
Muse	Female	32	Single	ESS	7 months	Seven Mile Elementary
Metchen	Female	41	Single	All levels	2 years	Seven Mile Elementary
Moner	Female	32	Single	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	2 years	Whiteriver Elementary

### Research Instrument

In qualitative studies, the researcher plays a crucial role in collecting data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As the theoretical perspective associated with this research is phenomenology, the study aims to understand the essence and meaning of the experiences, coping strategies, and challenges of Filipino teachers living and teaching abroad in the US. The researcher's responsibility is to obtain a sense of meaning that is relatable and transferable to the participants' and readers' lives. The researcher assumes the position of the key data collection instrument in this study (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, their primary role is to design open-ended questions that capture the essence of the phenomenon to study, collect data, and analyze it. The researcher also assumes the responsibility of making meaning of the data on a universal scale, which allows for the development of a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. To ensure data accuracy, the researcher remains objective while collecting data and analyzing it. This approach allows the researcher to make meaning of the data while minimizing the possibility of introducing their own biases (Merriam, 2009). Beginning with the distribution of family background and age questionnaires to informants, a comprehensive data collection strategy was employed for the study. Prior to the interviews, participants were given an interview guide outlining the study's objectives and key questions. Field notes were taken throughout the various phases of the study, from the initial contact with conversation partners to the series of interviews conducted, to ensure an accurate and exhaustive data set. During these sessions, the participant's facial expressions, gestures, annotations, emphasis, pauses, and silence was observed and recorded in the field notes. The online zoom conference application software was used in recording the interviews and transcribing the responses of the participants in great detail, thereby increasing the study's precision and reliability. These meticulous data collection procedures provided the study's conclusions with a solid foundation. In this study, a semi-structured interview was employed to gather pertinent information from the participants. The researcher utilized in-depth virtual interviews, which were recorded and allowed for an extensive exploration of the Filipino teachers' perspectives on their experiences, coping strategies, and challenges while living and teaching abroad in the US. These in-depth interviews gathered rich and profound data that accurately reflected the participants' experiences. The virtual interviews were conducted in a conversational style, lasted less than an hour, and were recorded with the participants' permission. The researcher also made observations during the interviews, transcribing the setting, historical details of conversations, and participants' expressions of emotions and behaviors. These observations complemented the audio recordings. The researcher confirmed the recorded interviews twice with the participants before analyzing them verbatim. The audio recordings were destroyed after a week to ensure anonymity. Personal interviews were the primary data gathering method used, where the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with the participants using a set of open-ended questions designed to facilitate and guide the

conversation. The overarching question and additional open-ended interview questions encouraged the participants to express their feelings. This data collection method efficiently solicited and documented the participants' perspectives, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes, and beliefs about their personal experiences and social world, including factual information about their lives (Saldaña, 2011).

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are not commonly used terms, but rather concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2021). These terms are collectively known as "trustworthiness," which reflects the idea that qualitative researchers aim to establish confidence in their findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guest et al., 2021). To achieve trustworthiness, qualitative researchers use a range of techniques, such as member checking, thick description, and triangulation, to enhance the rigor and transparency of their studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guest et al., 2021).

According to Creswell and Creswell (2021), trustworthiness is established through several strategies such as prolonged engagement, peer review, member checking, and triangulation. Prolonged engagement refers to the researcher's extended involvement with the research participants to ensure a deep understanding of the study phenomenon. Peer review is the process of having other researchers review the research design and findings to ensure that they are trustworthy. Member checking involves going back to the research participants to validate the findings. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources, methods, and researchers to ensure that the findings are reliable. Other scholars, such as Tracy (2020), have emphasized the importance of reflexivity in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. Reflexivity involves acknowledging and reflecting on the researcher's biases, values, and assumptions that may impact the research process and findings. Additionally, Tracy (2020) suggests that researchers should be transparent about their research process and provide a detailed description of their methods, data collection, and analysis to ensure trustworthiness.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

Thematic analysis is a research method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. To carry out this method, the researcher can follow the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which include transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the data, coding the essential features of the data systematically, collating data relevant to each code, collating codes into potential themes, generating a thematic map of the analysis, generating clear definitions and names for each item, and producing a scholarly report of the analysis. For this study, the appropriate technique for data collection was in-depth interviews, which have become the primary data collection method closely associated with qualitative, human scientific research. Real-world interviews provide the chance to learn answers to interview questions and gather extra information from the interviewee through their body language, small talk, and knowledge of the surrounding area (Ennerberg & Economou, 2022). The interviews were conducted through a zoom video conferencing app, and an interview guide was used to gather information about the research participants' education, training, and experiences. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, they were assigned codes instead of using their real names. During the actual interview, the researcher consider the use of native language. The interviewer asked easy questions with empathy and asked tough questions with a toned-down voice to elicit answers that illustrate depth and detail, vividness, nuances, and richness. The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. To avoid biases, the researcher based the questions on different domains and not from her knowledge of the experiences in the teaching field. The rigor of this study was established through the use of constructs such as transferability, confirmability, dependability, and credibility.

### **Data Analysis**

In this qualitative study, the researcher utilized in-depth interviews using open ended questions as primary tools for data collection. The data collected from the were then transcribed verbatim, reviewed for accuracy, and assigned pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality. To analyze the data, the researcher followed Creswell's six steps. Firstly, the transcribed data were organized and prepared. Secondly, the researcher read and re-read the transcripts to gain an overall understanding of the data, noting down initial ideas and impressions. Thirdly, the researcher developed a set of initial codes based on the data collected and research questions. These codes were developed using a systematic and iterative process. Fourthly, the initial codes

were reviewed and sorted into potential themes. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they were distinct, coherent, and accurately reflected the data. In the fifth step, the researcher reviewed and defined the themes using a thematic map that visually represented the relationship between the codes and themes. The themes were refined and revised until they accurately reflected the data. Finally, the themes and sub-themes were used to develop a scholarly report of the analysis that included a detailed description of the themes supported by relevant quotes from the transcripts. The report was reviewed and revised to ensure it accurately reflected the data and answered the research questions. Through this thorough analysis process, the study was able to produce valid and reliable findings that shed light on the experiences, coping strategies, and challenges of Filipino teachers living and teaching internationally.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In conducting a rigorous qualitative study, it is crucial to ensure the veracity and transferability of the data collected. Credibility, as defined by Del Siegle (2019), is achieved when the researcher remains on the research site until data saturation is reached. Transferability, on the other hand, pertains to the accurate description of the research environment and underlying presumptions in terms of generalizability within the specific contexts of the study, as outlined by Dawadi et al. (2021). The study's results may also be applicable in other settings or contexts, according to Dawadi et al. (2021). The researcher ensured ethical considerations in the study, starting with obtaining informed consent from all participants and assigning pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Ethical questions arose, particularly regarding the researcher's position in the field of international education and the potential for conflicts of interest. However, no other ethical issues surfaced during the study as all participants joined voluntarily, signed consent forms, and were free to withdraw without penalty at any time. To further protect their privacy, participants' names were changed, and their current employment countries were referred to by region or continent. All contributors were briefed on the study's rationale and expectations and given the opportunity to review the study's findings. To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the study's participants, a strict protocol will be implemented in storing and handling data. Firstly, all participants will be required to sign a consent form, which will then be stored in an external hard drive that is password-protected for a period of five years following the interview. Additionally, paper-based interview transcripts and correspondence will be scanned and stored in the same password-protected external hard drive. After the study is completed, the paper copies will be securely destroyed.

Only the researcher will have access to the external hard drive where the signed consent forms and scanned interview transcripts are stored, and no one else will be allowed access to this information. Furthermore, participants will be informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without any negative consequences, and that their decision to withdraw will not affect their relationship with the researcher or the organization they are associated with.

### **Results and Discussion**

This chapter contains the results and analysis of the qualitative data from the interviews.

#### **Participants Personal Biographies**

Ten international teachers voluntarily participated in this study. These ten teachers are currently teaching in the different schools of Whiteriver Unified School District.

##### **Participant 1 (“Gener”)**

“Gener”, 55 and already married, started at a private school for 2 years. She worked under the Local School Board for 5 years and 9 years in the Department of Education. She had been a HEKASI Teacher in the previous school where she was at in the Philippines. She completed her Academic Requirements in Master of Arts with Special Education Specialization. She is currently teaching in 2nd Grade in Seven Mile Elementary School, Whiteriver Unified School District.

##### **Participant 2 (Mr. Tougher)**

“Mr. Tougher”, 35, single, had been in the Department of Education for 14 years. He taught Science, English and MAPEH Subjects in the Philippines and has Master’s Degree in Educational Management. Presently, he is teaching 2nd Grade in Cradleboard Elementary School, Whiteriver Unified School District. He has been in the US for almost seven months.

##### **Participants 3 (“Bar”)**

“Bar”, 32, married, had been in the Department of Education for 10 years and had been assigned as Head Teacher I in his previous school in Samar. Presently, he is teaching 2nd Grade in Cradleboard Elementary School, Whiteriver Unified School District. He is handling ELA, Math and Science.

**Participant 4 (“Ledijud”)**

“Ledijud” worked in the Department of Education for 8 years in the Division of Negros Oriental. He is 30 years old, single and presently teaching Grade 7th and 8th World History and US Government in Canyon Day Junior High School, Whiteriver Unified School District. He had been in the USA for 2 years.

**Participant 5 (“Bandy”)**

“Bandy”, 38, single, female has been in the department of education for 15 years. She had been in the United states for 1 year and 7 months and is currently teaching 3rd Grade in Seven Mile Elementary School, Whiteriver Unified School District. She has two unfinished Master’s Degrees.

**Participant 6 (“Jannez”)**

“Jannez”, widowed, had been in the education sector for 17 years. She had been teaching in the private school in Mindanao. She is currently teaching 2nd grade in Seven Mile Elementary School, Whiteriver Unified School District. She still plan to pursue her graduate studies.

**Participant 7 (“Liscioco”)**

“Liscioco” had been in the Department of Education for 6 years with units in Master of Arts in Educational Administration. She had been in the United States of America for almost 2 years and currently teaching Mathematics in Alchesay High School, Whiteriver Unified School District.

**Participant 8 (“Muse”)**

“Muse”, 32, single, female had been in the Department of Education for 10 years in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City with units in Master of Arts in Educational Administration. She has been in the United States for almost eight months and currently Exceptional Student Services Resource Teacher in Seven Mile Elementary School, Whiteriver Unified School District.

**Participant 9 (“Metchen”)**

“Metchen”, female, 41, had been in the Department of Education for almost 16 years and taught all subjects in grades 2 and 4 in the previous school where she was assigned in the Philippines. She has a Master’s Degree in Educational Management. She had been in the United States for almost 2 years and is currently teaching in Seven Mile Elementary School, Whiteriver Unified School District.

**Participant 10 (“Moner”)**

“Moner”, 32, female, hailed from the Division of Bacolod City was in the department for almost 9 years. She had completed her Academic Requirements in Master of Education, Major in Administration and Supervision. She has been in the United States for almost 2 years and presently teaching in Whiteriver Unified School District.

Thematic Insights

**Emerging Themes**

Four major themes emerged, namely: Navigating through the newness, Delving Into the System, Dealing with the Changes, and Planning Into the Future. Each has its own subtheme that present more clearly the details of the experiences, challenges, and prospects of those teachers living and working abroad.

**Theme 1: Navigating Through The Newness**

**Subtheme 1: Being Away From Home**

When one lives and works away from the family, one of the emotional drawbacks is that of homesickness (Alghamde & Otte, 2016 as cited by Sumalinog, 2020). They miss family affairs, they cannot physically touch their loved ones and they cannot be home unless the contract is over. The homesickness is even more profound during holidays. Filipinos tend to gather during these special occasions and being physically away from their families make their situation even harder. Some even suffered mental health issues but have to grit their teeth for fear of losing their jobs (Chua, 2021). This was supported by two of the interviewed participants, Gener and Muse, saying: But I, you know, I cried a lot and, you know what I mean, because I think all of the Filipino, Filipino teachers has been, uh, uh, struggling on this home sickness (Gener). It would at least be like loneliness and missing your family way back home because teaching in the USA you will think that it would be difficult (Muse).

## **Subtheme 2: Living Conditions**

People's lives undergo a lot of changes when they move away from home and begin a new life somewhere. As one of the most significant hurdles they had to overcome when they immigrated to the United States, teachers cited creating new living arrangements in the host community. The climate and the new environment, the space and the transportation they have to share with others, the fact that you have to be more mindful of yourself since there is no family to take care of you are just some of the conditions they experience. With two of the participants' words,

“Um, aside from that they adapt to change the environment and the, the climate and the weather. Everything is new. So you really have to take good care of your health and learn from other teachers how to like, take good care of yourself, (Mr. Tougher)

and Uh, with regards to my personal experience, um, uh, the truth is it was hard for me at first because, um, with regards to the apartment or house to stay, I was having a problem with that (Moner). Still, they have to adapt and learn to navigate their way through these changes. Ospina & Medina (2020) cited that many who work in the United States learned how to drive because it is a necessity. As Bar would state,

“Uh, the first thing or difficult, uh, challenge that I had here is the transportation.”

Teachers practice carpooling to cut down the expenses in traveling to work but some of them eventually have to drive on their own because public transport is hard to come by.

## **Theme 2: Delving Into the System**

### **Subtheme 1: Culture Shock**

One of the most common challenges these teachers have to face is the wide disparity of the Oriental and Western culture. Culture's principle includes a wide range of human actions, products, and institutions for people with varied educational backgrounds, experiential backgrounds, and life experiences (Quinopez et al, n.d.). These overlapping of identities may cause culture shock. Teachers may have the mental preparation of what to expect through information gleaned from the internet and other people, but nothing can prepare them from the actual life of being in the USA. As Moner, Liscioco and Bandy would have it, “And maybe another thing, um, the great experience that I had is there was a kind of big adjustment that I had knowing that I will be working at different country in a different culture with a different race.” “And also, uh, there's a lot of, like, in you, you are living in a different country, so it's, the environment is different. So you have to deal with your, with your emotions and your social, social aspects of your life.” “So my personal experience when I came here, um, I would just say it's a culture shock because of the place. Okay. And then, um, the kind of students I have” However, being exposed to a different culture enabled these teachers to embrace and adjust to it. Thomas (2019) reported that instead than passing judgment on the host culture, the participants changed their expectations in response to the cultural variations. Through this flexible adjustment, a positive personal and worklife can be established in a foreign land. Muse is wise to invest in this, saying, “My experiences as a teacher in the United States is number one, you need to be flexible because as a teacher in the U S A, there are lots of things that you need to adjust. Like you don't have yet the experience of how to handle like foreign students and you've never been into their culture.”

### **Subtheme 2: Educational Encounters**

#### **Subtheme 2.1: Teacher Assignment**

Teachers in the US may find that the teaching load is a lot lighter compared to the Philippines. Moreover, the teaching strategies and curriculum are not the ones being used that even a seasoned teacher may find herself or himself struggling in the first few months of arrival. The use of technology can be intimidating to those teachers who practice traditional style. As experienced, these are their stories on this matter.

So that's my first, um, personal experience here, having a hard time with the student because I, I was being compared to the, uh, prior teacher. –Liscioco But when I came here, it's totally different from what I am used to. Here I am a subject teacher, so I only get to teach one subject to all of the students from kindergarten to fifth grade. And I only have a limited time for each of the grade level or each of the students. –Metchen Uh, especially, uh, my, my ways, my teaching ways in the Philippines, it's way different here. –Mr. Tougher Cause we're online classes. And you know what, during my, yeah, during, it's another challenges to me because during my eighties, we don't have computers. Oh. So we have a computer subjects,

but it's only a theory, not hands-on. So for me it's really challenging. I cope up. I never give up. So I continue. -Gener The good thing is that teaching abroad not only helps teachers become more culturally aware, but it also helps them teach more effectively (Altun, 2015, as cited by Ozturk et al, 2015). They did not remain stuck to what they did back in the Philippines. They note variations in how students learn. Various methods aid in the professional growth and development of instructors (Serin, 2017). Bar agreed to this statement. "So when it comes to teaching, uh, the method or strategies that I found, um, effective, one of which is, uh, having a good classroom management and also how the differentiated instruction is structured because class classroom management is really a time saver and a life saver as well."

### **Subtheme 2.2: Classroom Management**

Admittedly, one of the greatest challenges international teachers have to deal with is classroom management. Despite having years of teaching expertise in their home countries, they struggled to deal with behavior issues in their classrooms (Ospina & Medina, 2020). Given the different culture of the West, they are not accustomed to learners being rude and talking back, missing the respect accorded by Filipino learners (Modesto, 2020.) Teaching experience or experiences here in the United States. Um, I have this student, um, who has like a behavioral inconsistencies, um, and, um, he threw pencil at me. Oh, he was having tantrums in the classroom. -Jannez

So it actually is about me not being able to manage the, the behavior of the kids that easy, because here, teaching middle school is just a challenging, um, experience . So, yeah, um, as I was just talking about, it's, it's, um, mostly with managing the behavior of the kids. Um, that's the most difficult challenge that I have encountered during my first year of teaching. -Ledijud And another challenge also is when it comes to classroom management, I think it, that is also my hardest challenge I ever had. -Bar

One is, um, the children's attitude towards learning. -Mr. Tougher The majority of individuals talked about a time when they noticed the disparities of the educational values shared by Filipino and US pupils. Participants agreed to this by characterizing the significance of education among American students as an entitlement and as a "right" that not everyone exercises. In contrast, they characterized the significance of education to Filipino children as a "steppingstone to get them out of poverty," and to some, an opportunity and a luxury (Bassett, 2018).

## **Theme 3: Dealing With The Changes**

### **Subtheme 1: Teacher Support**

Working in a foreign environment necessitates becoming adaptable in order to communicate socially and sustain a suitable relationship, people must acclimatize to the host culture while navigating a foreign surrounding and different culture (Reyes et al., 2020). Notwithstanding all the difficulties that Filipino educators have encountered and will continue to face, these difficulties are seen as opportunities for them to quickly acclimate to their new environments. Support and a sense of community from other foreign teachers was commonly reported as having a positive effect on teachers' time abroad. The majority of situations for teachers abroad would allow an individual to connect with other foreigners from a similar home culture. Many schools have multiple foreign teachers, so a built-in support system is common (Bassett, 2018). Not only that, Filipinos are being housed together encouraging a supportive atmosphere from each other. Hence, this type of support system is felt by the participant and enabled them to adjust quickly to the changes they encounter. Based on their testimonials, they can attest to this teacher support. I was so grateful with the help of the other Filipino teachers. So from them I was able to get ideas and learn from them of their experiences before. And also with the help of my family who supports me of, uh, what am I pursuing in my career. And that because of my family, it helps me to motivate myself and encourage myself to improve as a person and um, as a teacher as well. -Moner I have a lot of, you know, supportive friends, um, supportive Filipino friends who would, you know, rally behind me whenever I am sad, whenever I was angry because of, you know, um, that frustration that I was getting in my first year of teaching. -Ledijud it's just that I'm so grateful that the management is so supportive. They give us a, what's the, we call it, uh, p l c mentoring. And with those se uh, with those seminars or orientations, it gives me, it provides me a a lot of opportunities to learn and grow. -Bandy Oh, um, with the challenges that I've had here, um, what I do with it is I usually talk to my colleagues, especially to those who have been here. ...and also from my mentoring teacher. I'm so thankful for that. Cause here they have mentoring teachers that they provide for new teachers here -Metchen

So luckily I have mentor, our school principal provided me with a mentor who has been teaching for like 15 years already here in the US.- Mr. Tougher

### **Subtheme 2: Rewards and Relationships**

As the teachers get the hang of things, they find ways on how to make things work.

the reward system that they have provided, that is also a big help for me, um, with the classroom management that I've been struggling for these two years. –Metchen So getting to know the kids really, really help me. Getting to know their roots, getting to like chit chat with them, the free time.-Jannez let's say, um, overcome that by, you know, building relationship with the kids. It, it, it's really, um, important to build relationship with the kids. Um, just simply connecting with, with them, connecting with their experiences, talking about your stories as well. Um, in, in that sense, you are able to build that bridge, you know, towards them that enables them to understand you as well. So, um, it, it's that point. It's in that point where you are able to respect each other and, and give that sense of, you know, um, understanding. –Ledijud

At the beginning of the intercultural experience, developing rapport with students may take some time; nevertheless, teachers can make the required adjustments to build their relationship with a class within the time constraints they have (Ospina & Medina, 2020). Those who have an open and critical mind will be able to assess similarities and differences and execute effective teaching as a result of intercultural awareness. Instructors who observe these distinctions while working overseas can use these skills back home. Thus, reflective teaching can occur. The participants build relationships toward their learners. They begin to see them as kids who need connection, kids who may have their struggles and they may be kids who need to be heard. Establishing a personal relationship with them gave way for the learners to warm to these Filipino teachers. Plus, the rewards that they get for a job well done can be motivating for them and can foster positive attitude towards their teachers.

### **Subtheme 3: Personal Downtime**

While dealing with the various challenges, Filipino educators frequently viewed them as motivators rather than as discouraging factors. This kind of thinking encourages them to keep working despite obstacles (Reyes et al., 2020). Because the teachers are well-compensated, they can have personal downtime to recharge for their daily work. Individuals seek happiness and enjoyment in order to be more engaged at work. Stress-relieving activities strengthen them for the long haul. Also, Quinopez et al. (n.d.) emphasized that Filipinos consider their faith in God as the bedrock in which they can put their hope into. When asked what they do to keep them going, here are their responses for their personal downtime:

if there are some times that are have that we have breaks like in every quarter I usually do go on trips or, or spend time with friends and families that are willing to spend me too.-Metchen I listen to Christian music. That's one thing that, uh, relieves me very well. When I encounter challenges and if you have like stress food, then go eat <laughs> And I feel really relieved when I do travel.- Muse

So what helps me is just to pray so that I will calm down myself. So ask God for strength and guidance to be able to perform, to perform what is expected of my, uh, from my family and of course what is expected of, uh, the school from me as a teacher. So that's it.-Moner

## **Theme 4: Planning Into the Future**

### **Subtheme 1: Business Plans**

A tangible reward in living and working and working abroad is its financial compensation (Modesto, 2020). Needless to say, teachers are paid here up to ten times more than what they are earning back home. This monetary aspect is what mainly lured these teachers to work abroad in the first place. They are able to pay off their loans, have some funds for leisure and even better is that they have prospects of investing in business. They know they have a contract to fulfill and as the money is still pouring in, a plan is put in place that they may have something to show for all the work they do in the US. Gener and Bandy have this prospect in mind. So my first year when I come back, I will do my business. So I really wanted to have a business for first year. –Gener I have this option, like a plan B maybe to continue teaching back in the Philippines or do some business. Something like that.-Bandy

### **Subtheme 2: Cultural Exchange**

Teacher educators become more conscious of their own views about culture, learning, and change as a result of cross-cultural learning experiences. As a result of their interactions with Americans and other instructors from across the world, participants in this study claimed to have developed a stronger understanding of other cultures (Ospina & Medina, 2020). Teachers who have international experience develop cultural empathy and they learn to be sensitive to other cultures and people (Serin, 2017). Because of this new-found understanding, they want to share to others what they have experienced. In fact, the Association of Fil-AM Teachers in America, Inc. (AFTA) has this Balik-Turo Program (AFTA, 2021) in which US-based Filipino teachers return to the country and share what they learn from there. Four participants have similar inclinations to this mission project of AFTA. I need to share what the learnings that they have here and I will share it for the second year when I go home. -Gener we'll basically all go, I will be going back to the Philippines maybe in the next four or five years I would be, I would be introducing some of the things that I've learned here. -Mr. Tougher Yeah, just continue teaching and share whatever I have learned here since it's, I'm a cultural exchange teacher. So I think that's the purpose, purpose of being here, to share what I have learned and experience here, the culture that they have here. Maybe some learnings like strategies or ways on how to better teach, uh, our children back in the Philippines. Yeah. -Bandy And If given the chance to work again in a school or institution, maybe I can do that where I can practice and share what I've learned here in US. -Moner

### **Subtheme 3: Pursuing Further Studies**

Teachers who have intercultural experiences tend to perceive teaching and learning more logically. Participants said that having the opportunity to teach in the United States allowed them to further their careers (Ospina & Medina, 2020). Four of these participants want to pursue their post graduate studies given the chance for it. Serin (2017) pinpoints the desire of teachers who have worked in the international scene to pursue professional development to develop their teaching abilities more. Also, having higher degrees will prepare them for a higher pay in the US. Here are the parts of the interview in which Bar, Muse, Moner, and Metchen express their plans for further studies. So, um, my pleasure is God willing, is to go back to the deputy and of course, pursue my studies, hopefully in doctorate degree. -Bar And then I hope to pursue my masterals degree and then graduate from it and be a better teacher. -Muse one major plan is maybe, uh, uh, go back to school, finish my, also, uh, finish my thesis as well and my master's degree. -Moner I'm planning to, if I can finish my master's degree this year I'm planning to pursue a doctorate degree. - Metchen

### **Subtheme 4: Career Options**

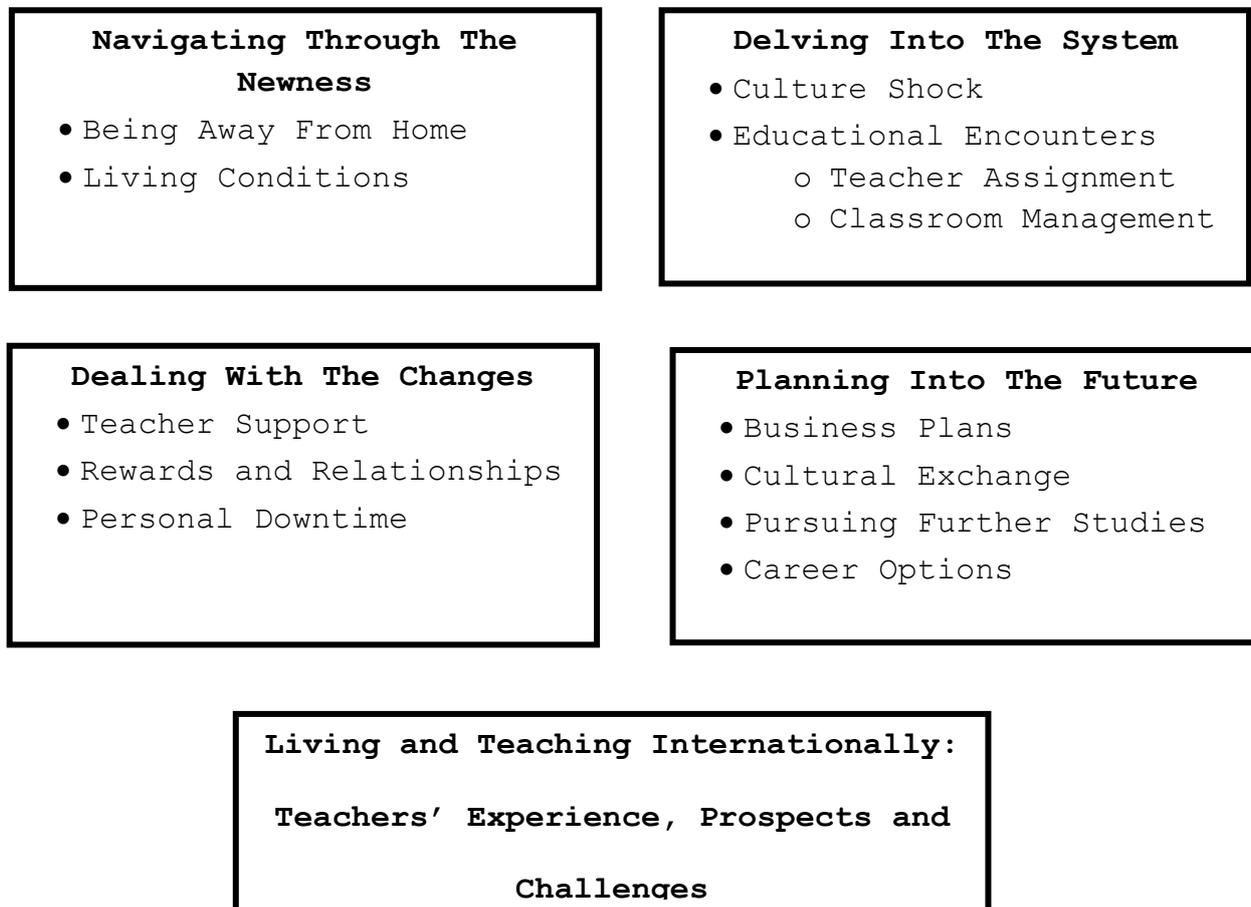
Another option they envision to take is the continuance of their career as a teacher. As these three put it, So after my program, which is just um, five year program, I'll be going back to the Philippines and well, well probably stay there for good. But, um, I have no plans yet on going back to teaching because honestly, I, I think I have enough of teaching already, you know, you know what I mean? But, um, if God willing, I will be teaching in probably in the tertiary, you know, um, tertiary level, uh, let's say college students back home if that will allow. So yeah, those are still plans, but I know I will be able to figure out when I'll be in the Philippines. -Ledijud And then hopefully I can come back here and be able to teach here. But if not, I can go back to teaching in the public school that where I'm used to. -Metchen And then for the second year, I will be, go back to teaching. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So I will be teaching. -Gener Teachers working abroad can evaluate their own countries from different angles and find that the working conditions in an international arena are much better (Serin, 2017). This results in a change of preference. In order to further their careers, teachers who work overseas adopt new aspirations. After their overseas experience, they choose to work more in international affairs when they return to their home country. However, it is not always the case but the bottom line for these three teachers is that wherever their paths may lead to, being able to teach is very much part of their future plans.

### **Simulacrum**

From the interview of ten participants, their experiences gave way to the theme Navigating through the Newness with the following subthemes: Personal Struggles and Living Conditions. The challenges of living and working abroad gave two themes, Delving Into the System and Dealing With the Changes. The first

yielded two subthemes: Culture Shock and Educational Encounters about Teacher Assignment and Classroom Management. The latter talks about their coping mechanisms with three subthemes as Teacher Support, Rewards and Relationships and Personal Downtime. Finally, the prospects of these teachers were encapsulated in the theme Planning Into the Future which includes Business Plans, Cultural Exchange, Pursuing Further Studies, and Career Options.

Figure 1: Simulacrum of the Teachers' Experience, Prospects and Challenges



### Implications

Filipino educators frequently encounter opportunities abroad that come with challenges they must overcome. Adapting to a new situation is only sometimes straightforward, which presents obstacles for these educators. From the moment they immerse themselves in the foreign culture, their life is far from what they had back home. Whether these experiences will shape them positively or negatively is entirely up to them. Their personalities can be influenced by how they deal with the challenges intertwined with life and work abroad. But, as always, the Filipinos' indomitable spirit of optimism and the unfailing capacity to adapt can shine through amidst the intercultural complexities they go through. Their love for teaching and their love for their families are the two most vital factors to make them stay and dream of better things. The findings show us what it is like for these teachers to live and work abroad: their experiences, challenges, and prospects.

### Recommendations

The recommended actions for the findings will be as follows:

1. The Department of Education should consider making teaching in the department an attractive one. For starters, an increase in the salary of these professionals can lure them to stay. Additional benefits and minimizing the workload can be incredibly beneficial for both parties.
2. Support can be given to international teachers as they tread their path into a new culture. Their families could be a significant factor in making their jobs easier. Also, intra-personal and interpersonal undertakings

are essential to keep these teachers sane and functional. To increase their job satisfaction, build friendships with Filipino and American people, strengthen teaching support by being a team player, and find time for recreation can improve their working and living conditions.

3. To those who aim to teach abroad, reading the experiences of those who have gone before them can at least give them a glimpse of what it is like to be working there. Therefore, they should take hold of whatever material they can get their hands on to prepare them for what is at stake mentally.

4. US schools and school districts can continue giving the teachers support offered to Filipino teachers. These participants have shared how they are correctly mentored to adjust to the new educational system. There can also be feedback from the districts and the international teachers so they work better and each other's needs are met.

5. International organizations advocating teachers' rights and responsibilities can help in Filipino teachers' smooth transition. They can help look out for their own in a foreign land. Moreover, in cases of abuse, these organizations can initiate an independent fact-finding committee to deliver unbiased information.

6. OWWA may enhance its policies on protecting Filipino workers abroad. They may provide training aligned and needed by our fellow citizens to the skill sets of the country they are to work in

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