



Adaptation to Foreign Schools in Southeast Asia of Filipino ESL Teachers

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Abstract— English language teaching and learning are critical for the development of the country and its people. English language teaching has grown in popularity throughout Southeast Asia, both among native and non-native English speaker-teachers. However, only a few studies have been conducted to define and characterize English language education. This study examined the experiences and adaptations of ten Filipino English teachers and their perspectives on teaching English as a foreign language in Southeast Asia. The technique used was Questionnaires were distributed via Google forms and shared on various Facebook groups for Filipino ESL teachers working in Southeast Asian schools. While Filipino teachers are enthusiastic about teaching English to international students, the findings indicate that they encountered challenges with students' attitudes and behavior and social, cultural, environmental, and language barriers, which harmed their teaching efficiency. Language barriers frequently hampered the teaching process, as students' native tongues are frequently dissimilar to teachers', resulting in miscommunication. Parental involvement and social contact in a foreign environment were two of the most frequent difficulties encountered by Filipino ESL teachers. They devised a variety of strategies to meet these demands in response to these obstacles. The implications are discussed, and future research is recommended.

Keywords— Cultural Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, ESL Teachers, Language Barriers, Second Language Learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Traveling to teach abroad provides excellent job prospects, compensation, and opportunities to immerse oneself in new cultures. Although it can be challenging at times, becoming a teacher is a personally and professionally rewarding experience. The demand for English teachers abroad has increased significantly due to globalization and the critical role that English education and learning play in a country's development. The English language's role in globalization and the concerns about teaching English as an international language for speakers of other languages have garnered considerable attention from teachers working in the field of English worldwide [1]. Numerous researchers have examined the global role of English, the language's global status, and the implications of English's international status for language instruction. According to [1], English plays a significant role in globalization, particularly in contemporary times. It is currently at the forefront of debates over the commonality of English language instruction as a foreign language. ASEAN countries hired several ESL teachers to equip learners with mastery and fluency in English as a second language, owing to the need for ESL teachers for their development. This research aims to discover how Filipino ESL teachers adapt to their new work environment in a foreign school.

II. RELATED WORK

According to [2], English is spreading globally as a global language and is no longer a language spoken exclusively in countries where it is the first language (mother tongue). Thus, these changes have impacted countries that have employed native and non-native ESL teachers in public and private schools and universities that teach English. The requirement for English to be used as a lingua franca has resulted in policy changes in Southeast Asian nations' language education systems. Apart from massive teacher training and other professional development programs, most private and public schools and universities in Southeast Asia have trained native and non-native English speaking teachers to modernize language instruction, expand bilingual services, and improve students' English language proficiency [3]. Although most businesses prefer to hire native English speakers, many non-native English speakers are hired to assist local teachers in their classrooms. Filipinos are among the best English-speaking teachers outside the United States. The employment of these Filipinos as non-native English language teachers contributes to the growing number of non-native English language teachers in Asian countries and the growing number of Asian immigrants.

As the third-largest English-speaking nation after the United States and the United Kingdom, the Philippines' importance as a market for English language learning is no

longer surprising. Recent studies on international teacher mobility and migration explain why teachers are frequently enticed to leave their home country. Teachers who left their homelands expressed dissatisfaction with their home country's educational system. They wish to work as an English teacher abroad in order to expand their opportunities and living standards. Many Filipino teachers chose to work in countries such as the United States to earn a higher salary while also providing better living conditions for their families [4].

Filipino teachers who teach English as a Second Language in these countries face numerous challenges and changes and must adapt to these changes. There is an endless supply of Filipino teachers, and there is a pay differential between teaching in South East Asian countries and teaching in the United States. They must integrate into their students' culture, environment, and classroom settings. According to studies conducted by [5], communication barriers such as difficulty understanding the native language and producing appropriate accents, cultural differences, and individual preferences contribute to the breakdown of harmonious relationships; discrimination was noted to occur infrequently. Their lack of familiarity with the indigenous vernacular harmed their ability to comprehend and interact with the indigenous culture [6]. One of the difficulties Filipino ESL teachers face is learning the indigenous languages of the schools.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative analysis approach. Semi-structured interviews were used to conduct this research study. Survey questionnaires were distributed through Google forms. There were ten Filipinos who taught in Southeast Asian schools in the study. The teachers' ages ranged from 20 to 45, and their cumulative teaching experience ranged from 3 months to 6 years.

Survey questionnaires were disseminated through Google forms and Facebook groups. Interviews were in English and centered on the respondents' English teaching experience and conditions in Southeast Asian schools. After the researchers did the transcription, coding took place, and data were analyzed, interpreted, and checked. The data were categorized and analyzed, after which the researchers identified the emerging themes and sub-themes.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Common Personal Perceptions of Filipino ESL Teachers in Teaching to Foreign Schools

Participants were asked about their perception of becoming an ESL teacher abroad, and almost all of them had a favorable opinion of ESL teachers. Their responses revealed that teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) should become familiar with and appreciate the cultures of their students. Also, they believed that teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) have the

opportunity to learn and understand the cultures of their students because of the following reasons:

"I am not just a language teacher, but I am a cultural ambassador too." (Teacher 1)

"I like maintaining the so-called Unity in diversity, despite different types of culture, but the purpose is to learn ENGLISH as our second language." (Teacher 2)

"To communicate effectively and be a part of global language." (Teacher 3)

"Learning and practicing the language more." (Teacher 5)

"Discovering and adapting new things in a new culture." (Teacher 8)

"The opportunity to learn Thai culture." (Teacher 9)

Participants 6, 7, and 10 would find that teaching English as a second language opens up a world of possibilities, including a good salary, a comfortable working environment, opportunities for personal growth, and a sense of fulfillment.

Common Difficulties Encountered in Teaching and Coping Mechanisms

The interview established that teaching English in a foreign school presented challenges such as student attitudes and behavior, cultural, environmental, and language barriers. Participants 1 and 9 struggled with their students' attitudes and behavior while teaching in a foreign school.

"I think the hardest part I have encountered teaching English was dealing with the students' behavior." (Teacher 1)

"Student's lack of respect" (Teacher 9)

Likewise, cultural, societal, and language barriers hampered participants 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10. Cultural differences hinder teaching abilities and confuse students. The language barrier also hinders the teaching process as students' native languages differ from teachers' native tongues, causing miscommunication. Parents and other non-native speakers of English are common challenges for Filipino ESL teachers.

"The cultural differences and being not able to understand most of their language." (Teacher 2)

"Language barrier and environment. If you are a foreign teacher here in Thailand, expect that some information is not being related to you; for instance, there would be an event, what clothes you will be wearing, and so on. If they see you on the spot on that day, that is the time they will be telling you what to wear. For the language barrier, students are 0 English, though they have English subject, they tend to forget the lessons easily as they are not that interested in learning and parents are too busy to teach them at home." (Teacher 4)

"Having to deal with foreign colleagues, both local Thais, and other nationalities, is an endless issue." (Teacher 5)

"The language barrier. Most of my colleagues have difficulty speaking English. That is why most of them resort

to being silent to avoid embarrassment. As a foreign teacher, I also have to assimilate with their culture. Thus, I have also to learn Vietnamese to bridge the cultural gap. However, learning Vietnamese is another difficult task as it is a tonal and a visual language. Every character and every tone represents a different meaning." (Teacher 6)

"People (parents of some) have doubts that you can speak English. I mean, I am a Filipino, so they look down on you. They only want native speakers. Not all but mostly." (Teacher 7)

"Misunderstanding and miscommunication between myself and the students" (Teacher 8)

"My only problem was my employer in Vietnam and their ways of teaching students." (Teacher 10)

Participants 2, 3, 7, and 10 suggested that to be a successful ESL teacher and adapt to a foreign school quickly, one should thoroughly understand the country's cultural background. Teaching students from different cultures would be easier than teaching students from cultures that the teacher knows little about. Language, on the other hand, should be emphasized as it is culturally significant. Miscommunication can be avoided by informing the students' language, different from the teacher's native tongue.

"You should start at first on adopting their technologies and culture (to) also learn their ways and culture so you can understand them well too and you can impart your ideas to them." (Teacher 3)

"Learn to speak the language where you are going to teach. Or at least try to know more about the country. If not, you will learn it the hard way." (Teacher 7)

"It depends on the methods used by the school since they have a different point of views and cultures." (Teacher 10)

Common Cultural Challenges, Experiences, and Adaptations

Participants were asked how they understand and adapt culture to ESL students. In addition, they were asked if they ever felt uncomfortable interacting with students from other cultures.

Participants 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 agreed that understanding another culture requires self-representation. They were concerned about the disparities and excited to learn that something unites us despite our differences. Students will be able to use techniques like this to bridge the language and cultural divide. Also, know your culture's etiquette and customs, and describe them clearly. Respect for others is vital because their culture is very different from ours.

"Different country, different cultures. As an ESL teacher, one should learn to know the cultural background of the students." (Teacher 1)

"At first, you can see a big difference in the culture but eventually, as you engaged with them, little by little you will adapt totally." (Teacher 2)

"Yes, uniqueness is good, but make sure still to be humble coz everyone is different in a way you were raised by...so better to adjust and be belong." (Teacher 3)

"Yes. Vietnamese are naturally shy. This prevented them from speaking English because, for them, less talk means fewer mistakes. This understanding could help me bridge the cultural and language gap by incorporating strategies that would alleviate their recitation apprehension and to better their student engagement." (Teacher 6)

"True. I did worry once. But I am living in another country in which it has different cultures to my own. So I just need to adapt to the environment here or else you will be depressed." (Teacher 7)

"Understanding other culture is imperative, and the process of understanding it is usually by reflecting their culture to your own culture. So yes, I worry about cultural differences. However, it is also a Joy to discover that even when we seem to be different, underneath all those differences is something universal to all." (Teacher 8)

"I understand their culture. It is similar to ours. They have high regard for their parents, elders, and Thai teachers. However, that is different when it comes to foreign teachers. The respect is much less. However, then again, respect begets respect. If you respect them, they will also respect you. Otherwise, they will be rude to you." (Teacher 9)

"You must know the D.O.'s and DONT in their culture and remind yourself to explain or ask the student everything is good or not to avoid misunderstanding. Many things are different in their culture versus our culture, so RESPECT is a must." (Teacher 10)

Participants were asked to share what they had learned about their students' cultures and describe how they acquired them. Additionally, they were questioned about their subsequent teaching methods in light of these experiences.

To better understand students' cultural diversity, Participant 1 indicated that the ESL teacher must recognize students' linguistic characteristics and meet their diverse needs. Numerous student activities are available to assist students in comprehending the fundamental nature and significance of various types of people. Teaching students about mixed role models demonstrate that all genders, ethnicities, and appearances are equal and positively impact the world. When students are exposed to the accomplishments of people from diverse ethnic, gender, and religious backgrounds in various fields, they develop an appreciation for and respect for diverse cultural backgrounds.

Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 9 mentioned how being an ESL teacher allows them to learn their students' cultures and understand them. Teachers must pay special attention

to how words are used when dealing with students, especially high school students, who tend to be moody and difficult to manage. Effective teaching requires effective communication with students.

The participants were questioned about their strategies for new ESL teachers adjusting to a new culture when they first began working in a foreign school. Almost all participants mentioned how critical it is to understand culture and language to adapt quickly to the culture of a foreign school. Participants 2, 6, 7, and 9 discussed their experiences and recommended strategies for adapting to the unique cultures of their foreign school.

Participant 2 stated that it is critical to understand students' diverse cultures to adapt to these distinct changes, but it is also critical to appreciate each teaching experience.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

The majority of Filipino ESL teachers interviewed in Southeast Asian countries emphasized the benefits of ESL teaching, including good pay, favorable working conditions, self-improvement, fulfillment, and flexibility. They also talked about how teaching ESL allows them to learn about and appreciate their students' cultures.

Aside from assisting students in learning, Filipino ESL teachers stressed maintaining positive relationships with others. Salary, title, and advancement opportunities are all essential extrinsic job characteristics. When asked about their current jobs and pay, ESL teachers emphasized both internal and external benefits, implying a general alignment between their needs and what they get.

While teaching English in a foreign school, Filipino ESL teachers encountered difficulties with students' attitudes and behavior, cultural, environmental, and language barriers. They agreed on the importance of having a few common lessons popular with most of their students and making these subjects compelling for learners. Lesson planning aims to assist the teacher in developing an effective course plan and implementing solutions to potential problems. Language awareness entails an awareness of the potential obstacles to learning that language can present. These difficulties may occur when a student is studying a subject in a second language or learning certain words or structures for the first time in their native language.

As to recommended ways for ESL teachers to adjust to different situations, ESL teachers must develop cultural relations and respond with cultural sensitivity. Individuals must integrate themselves into their communities. English teachers who teach in a culture other than their own must foster an atmosphere that fosters student achievement. To be a culturally aware educator, one must first become acquainted with and appreciate their students' cultural backgrounds. The student's native language has long been a source of controversy in the ESL classroom.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve the desired results, ESL teachers must effectively manage classrooms and create learning environments. It is advised that prospective ESL teachers learn the country's language because not knowing their native languages will hinder teaching efficiency. With limited English proficiency, ESL teachers must use a combination of game-based, Total Physical Response (TPR), and Whole Brain Power Teaching methods in the classroom. Teachers' methods must be adapted to different contexts and cultures. An instructor's preferred educational, psychological, or cultural teaching method may not be acceptable to all students or classes. Instructors must keep up with new texts, techniques, best practices, and professional development opportunities in ESL/ELL.

Finally, it must always be bear in mind that a good classroom is one in which students feel understood, valued, and protected while being empowered to take emotional and intellectual risks. It requires deliberate preparation and direct instructor contact. They must adapt to the social climate of a foreign school. Hence, studying the country's taboos and daily activities helps ESL teachers build stronger bonds with their students and communities. Intercultural understanding can help ESL teachers overcome cultural barriers when teaching in a foreign school.

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Dr. Albert Bulawat is a former English teacher from DepEd Nueva Ecija. At Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology – Papaya Off-Campus Program, he is the College Department Head and concurrently the Program Head for the BSEd program. Dr. Bulawat earned his Doctor of Education majoring in Educational Management with academic honors from Wesleyan University Philippines in 2019, as well as a Master of Arts of Education majoring in English, Magna Cum Laude, from the College of the Immaculate Conception in 2017 and a Bachelor in Secondary Education majoring in English from the same institution in 2014. He also holds a Master of Arts in Education concentration in Educational Management from Good Samaritan Colleges. He taught in the College of Education and worked as an in-house examiner for the Licensure Examination for Teachers. After six years of teaching, Dr. Bulawat has shown himself to be an experienced teacher with a demonstrated history of serving in higher education. He has also worked as a research and feasibility mentor, a member of the panelists, and the chairman of the panelists in numerous undergraduate research defenses at various schools in Nueva Ecija. He has also been a guest speaker at several workshops and training sessions on journalism, science, and personal growth. Dr. Bulawat has also worked as a freelance proofreader, critic, and reviewer for graduate students' manuscripts. He is a regular peer reviewer and manuscript editor for several international publications, where he has reviewed several scientific papers by academics from various countries. He was hailed as a three-time most outstanding teacher in his school for the deep love of his career.
