

Overseas Teaching: The Voice of Filipino Early Childhood Education Teachers in Singapore

Daryl Benedict L. Alicamen^{1,3*} and Allycca Mabe Krisha M. Becamon^{2,3}

¹*Philippine School Doha, Doha, 19664, Qatar*

²*PAP Community Foundation, New Upper Changi Road, SG 463057, Singapore*

³*Cebu Normal University, Cebu City 6000, Philippines*

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the lived experiences of Filipino early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Singapore. It utilized the qualitative research method, particularly Husserlian phenomenology. Fourteen Filipino ECE teachers were involved in this study who were chosen through purposive sampling based on the inclusion criteria - bachelor's degree graduates with specialization in ECE in any higher education institution in the Philippines and currently teaching in Singapore for at least two years. The researcher was regarded as the main instrument using the semi-structured interview. Colaizzi's method of data analysis was used to interpret the transcriptions. The analysis of the interview captured the experiences of the Filipino ECE teachers in Singapore and revealed the five overarching themes: Teaching abroad as life's turning point—Decision; Rigors of working abroad—Realities; Optimistic regard for adverse experiences—Conviction; Necessities for a successful pursuit—Fundamentals; and the desire to Echo the overseas journey upon return—Impact. These constitute the voice of ECE teachers in Singapore as they

teach overseas. It can be construed that the Filipino ECE teachers' experiences in a foreign country, no matter the adversities, have resulted in favorable outcomes and valuable life encounters that developed their professional, personal, and economic facets of life. This study provides the frame of reference for teachers who wish to venture overseas teaching on the circumstances they might encounter, whether on the personal or professional level. It also sheds light on the education department's efforts to

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E-mail addresses:

daryl.alicamen@psdqatar.com; darylbenedictalicamen@gmail.com

(Daryl Benedict L. Alicamen)

allyccamabekrishab@gmail.com (Allycca Mabe Krisha M.

Becamon)

* Corresponding author

strengthen the current educational system and internationalize ECE programs at higher education institutions in the Philippines.

Keywords: Colaizzi, early childhood education, ECE Teachers, Filipino teachers, phenomenology, lived experiences, overseas teaching, teaching abroad

INTRODUCTION

Education is the most effective weapon in global growth because no nation can survive in oblivion without exploring the relevance of global developments and reform in all facets of life. Globalization has had a major effect on education and its policies. In this aspect, the world seeks to find more competent and top-of-the-line educators as it strives to advance the standard of quality education. To deal with the dynamic demands in a diverse learning environment, foreign schools continue to employ teachers notwithstanding ethnicity and race while putting a premium on competence, values, attitude, and skills.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2018) has intensified the campaign that quality education would need well-trained teachers. Conversely, many teachers face meager salaries and precarious working conditions and must perform their responsibilities in unsafe or deprived settings. Since early childhood teaching is viewed as an inferior occupation in many developing countries, hiring competent teachers is an unrelenting challenge. A professionally trained early childhood educator who understands how to build a diverse and accountable learning culture is the heart of the top-quality early

childhood learning experience. Despite the critical role that early childhood educators assume, expanded public interest, and incremental investment for quality early education, early childhood educators are still imperiled to underprivileged employment situations (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2015).

The case is different in Singapore. There has been a huge clamor for early childhood education practitioners recently. According to Tan (2017), at the turn of the twenty-first century, the Singaporean government spent sufficient financial resources on developing and implementing policies and initiatives to upgrade the effectiveness of preschool education (PSE) in several regions. Zulkifli (2010) corroborates that the government agrees and understands that the formative years are paramount for children's holistic growth, and education must continue to be appropriate and flexible to address the optimum learning needs of young children. This action is evident as the government spends lavishly on education, investing about half of its overall social development budget, which amounts to around 3% of GDP per year (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2016).

According to Goy (2017), there is an emerging need for childcare programs in Singapore to satisfy the needs of young families. Currently, in a report by Elangovan (2020), the early childhood sector, according to the Minister for Social and Family Development, is excellently improving, with preschool sites forecast to upsurge from

180,000 to 200,000 by 2023. Therefore, it can be construed that the trend in hiring early childhood educators will continue to escalate in the coming years.

Filipinos who teach in other countries are recognized for their academic abilities, particularly in teaching the English language. As a result, Filipino teachers are marketable, especially in countries that have extended their curricula to contain English as a subject or a course. What is more, Filipino teachers are also well-reputed for being outstanding educators in early childhood education, physical education, and music (WhatALife, 2020). The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2019) Survey on Overseas Filipinos revealed that the total number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who went abroad for employment between April and September 2019, including teachers, was projected to be 2.2 million. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) statistics report on the deployed OFW teachers exposed that the teaching professionals exported to Singapore comprised 14% in 2016 and increased to 17% in 2017 (POEA, 2016, 2017). These notable figures continue to rise as the trend, and increasing demand for early childhood education professionals continues to surge in Singapore.

Seeing an increase in the number of teachers leaving the country is foreseeable since these figures are rising yearly. Working and relocating abroad is a big decision to make. As a new migrant, it can be challenging because one is now living in a nation that is vastly different from his or

her own. One of the most difficult aspects of relocating abroad is figuring out how to seamlessly integrate into one's host country's culture, traditions, environment, language, and customs, especially if it is a first-time experience in a different country. Thus, this study aims to put the life of a Filipino early childhood education teacher in Singapore into context. It can aid in preparing the teachers for the international teaching career, adapting to the cultural practices, and providing some basic information about Singapore's host country.

These teaching professionals discern to work abroad for numerous purposes. First, the Philippine government constantly protects its citizens from fraudulent recruiters and dubious agencies who trample on interested teachers (Sumalinog, 2020). In this sense, as Filipino teachers teach overseas, they gain insights and improve teaching strategies, placing them at an advantageous corner. Moreover, their foreign exposure makes them seem more creative and innovative in their respective classes. Additionally, they acquaint themselves with a diverse range of curricula, communicate with other professionals, and in due course, become professionally developed (Altun, 2015).

Hence, it is noteworthy to unveil the realities that the early childhood teachers experience while creating their professional identities in a first-world country like Singapore and the implications of these experiences to their job as teaching professionals. The results of this study could provide a window for other teachers who

desire to teach in foreign countries. It could also illuminate our education department to improve the present educational system alongside the internationalization of early childhood education programs in higher education institutions.

DOMAIN OF INQUIRY

This study focuses on exploring the lived experiences of Filipino early childhood education teachers in Singapore and the meanings of these in their lives. Specifically, it aims to describe the decision that motivated the teachers to work in a foreign country, the realities that they have experienced, the personal conviction that helped them thrive, the fundamental skills and qualifications one must possess, and the impact of this endeavor to their lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization launched more incentives for even more people. From the education perspective, it has increased opportunities for teaching and learning by promoting interconnectivity and cross-cultural experiences. In this aspect, working in a foreign community requires a person to be goal-oriented, possess the requisite qualifications, and be adaptive to succeed. Therefore, it emphasizes the importance of ensuring the right goals and mindset to thrive in teaching abroad (Uytico & Abadiano, 2020).

Generally recognized as an essential component of the educational system, teachers are at the forefront of expertise, competence, and values transmission.

Hence, they are known as the educational system's cornerstone. Following this idea, quality teachers must have quality learning experiences, particularly in early childhood education. According to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019), a plethora of multidisciplinary literature supports the importance of quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in laying a firm ground for lifelong learning that would lead to reaping social and economic benefits. These long-term opportunities have persuaded many countries worldwide, including Singapore, to emphasize ECEC on their national agenda, bringing concerted campaigns to achieve quality ECEC. Tan (2017) revealed that the Singaporean government policy is aimed to concentrate its attention on ways that can have the utmost leverage in boosting the overall standard of early education and improving the availability and accessibility for youngsters, including those from low-income households, in having a good start by completing quality preschools. Thus, this perpetuated the surge of the need for early childhood education professionals in their country.

Filipino teachers, having a significant level of English language competence and other relevant skills, heed the reverberating demand of early childhood teaching professionals in Singapore. One of the major findings of teacher migration and mobility, according to Education International's worldwide study in 2014, is those migrant teachers take chances to better their lives, boost their living conditions, or progress

their careers. For those who want to teach internationally, teaching may be a way to explore the world, appreciate other cultures, and develop cross-cultural competencies (Chacko & Lin, 2015). Hauerwas et al. (2017) stated that overseas teaching is an attractive choice for educators looking for work outside their home countries and cultures.

In light of this matter, better-equipped teachers are needed to teach in foreign countries. According to a study by Garcia (2018), the international teaching practicum is a valuable internship opportunity that fills the gap between mentors and teacher interns. This international teaching experience gave students a greater understanding and respect for other nations' history, society, education, and customs. This experience teaches the teacher interns how to properly translate educational findings and concepts to more practical and skill-based approaches to learning. It greatly impacts their fundamental training to become globally competitive educators.

According to Shiveley and Misco (2015), being employed in a foreign country has both personal advantages and pitfalls. Working overseas increases teachers' transnational awareness of the value of education. When teachers start in a new environment, they become more adaptive and reflective of their teaching methods and get rid of their dogmatic thought. Hence, they will use their concepts to improve international teaching methodologies. Teachers who teach in a foreign country develop their pedagogical abilities by

presenting students with the opportunity to consider several viewpoints and issues from various perspectives. Frederiksen (2014) and Sharma (2012) mention the benefits and drawbacks of living in another country. Teachers benefit from creating acquaintances from distinct nationalities, engaging new students, and learning a new language. Further, the motivations for teachers to want to work overseas were salary differentials, improved working conditions, family migration, and professional development exposures.

In the study of Modesto (2020), it was apparent that Filipino teachers in foreign countries perceived their experiences as growth, an opportunity, and a challenge. The study of Reyes et al. (2020) suggested the coping strategies, such as sociability, personality, and adaptability, which Filipino teachers must utilize for managing the problems of the employment world, including problems with the learners, along with the issues of the co-workers and the parents of children of various nationalities. Filipino educators are continually faced with opportunities abroad and difficulties they must resolve. Adapting to a different setting also proves daunting, often challenging these educators' personal and professional lives. Filipino educators are required to adapt to thrive no matter the differences and stress of transitioning to their social roles and expectations in their host countries. Similarly, revealed in the study by Dunn (2011), the challenges faced by Indian immigrant teachers were student conduct, culture shocks, communication issues,

modern educational methods and curricula, and cultural bias knowledge among the students. Moreover, it is illuminated that parents and students were disturbed by accents from immigrant teachers because of the pattern of distracting and confusing students.

In response to these challenges, teachers should note that quality learning and experience are at the center of education. In this respect, teachers should consider the cultural distinctions of learners (Medved et al., 2013).

To Bryan (2020), based on how much thought one puts into it, deciding to teach overseas will either advance the career in education or merely bolster the curriculum vitae and equip the teachers with expertise that can benefit them in other fields. It will give teachers an advantage over other teaching practitioners because they can claim real-world and direct experience that few others do. They learned new moves they could use in any classroom situation if they returned to teach in their home country, the Philippines.

METHODS

Research Design

This paper employed the qualitative research method, widely utilized in educational studies, particularly Husserl's phenomenological design. It aims to capture the informants' lived experiences and reduce them to an elucidation with universal meaning. In this type of phenomenology, the author supersedes or expels past experiences

to understand a phenomenon extensively. It endeavors to generate rich descriptive data from a lived experience by approaching it with a context of "novelty" (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The design is mostly consistent with the objectives of this research paper. It lays out specific steps and a direction for comprehending and analyzing the life perspectives of Filipino ECE teachers in Singapore.

Key Informants

Fourteen Filipino ECE teachers in Singapore were involved in this study and were chosen through purposive sampling. This figure corresponded to Laverty's (2003) estimate of five to twenty-five people who had experienced the same phenomenon. These informants sternly underwent a criterion-referenced sampling process. Generally, these informants are bachelor's degree graduates specializing in early childhood education in any higher education institution in the Philippines. In addition, they must be teaching as an ECE teacher in Singapore with at least two years of teaching experience in the said country.

Permission was asked from the key informants, and an informed consent form was given. Ample time was extended for the participants to consider their study involvement. Upon their consent, the purpose of the research, the scope of their involvement, the potential benefits and risks, the informants' rights, and anonymity were all clarified.

Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher is primarily regarded as the research tool. Thus, the ability to perceive “mundane” information, conduct thorough interviews, and reflect on the substance of observation and interview data are all crucially important to success (Xu & Storr, 2012). In this vein, the researcher used semi-structured interview questions that undergo validation by the experts. The purpose was to unveil and examine the lived experiences of Filipino ECE teachers in Singapore and the meanings they attribute to these in their lives. Interviews and focus group discussions were done through Zoom, a virtual teleconferencing platform.

Data Analysis

Colaizzi’s (1978) method of data analysis, which comprises seven steps, was used to interpret the transcriptions. Initially, (1) transcripts were read multiple times to get a general impression of statements. (2) Relevant phrases or sentences that relate specifically to the research objectives were determined from each transcript. (3) Noteworthy utterances and expressions were then used to construct meanings. (4) The formulated concepts were grouped into themes, enabling similar themes to appear through all the informants’ transcripts. (5) The findings were then incorporated into a rigorous and extensive explanation of the phenomena. (6) Following the collection of descriptions and themes, the researcher synthesized the detailed description into a brief, dense statement that captured only

the elements considered critical to the phenomenon’s nature. (7) The researcher approached the participants in the final phase to confirm the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the interview captured the experiences of the early Filipino childhood education teachers in Singapore and revealed the five overarching themes that can be gleaned in Table 1: Teaching abroad as life’s turning point—Decision; Rigors of working abroad—Realities; Optimistic regard for adverse experiences—Conviction; Necessities for a successful pursuit—Fundamentals; and the desire to echo the overseas journey upon return—Impact. These constitute the voice of ECE teachers in Singapore as they teach overseas. The following sections explain the various viewpoints on the topic.

Theme 1: Teaching Abroad as Life’s Turning Point — Decision

Teachers have expressed and considered teaching abroad as life’s turning point. In other words, it was a decision based on several reasons, namely: attractive remuneration packages, desire to have supportive and compassionate leaders, and local teaching encounters as stimuli in working overseas, optimistic regard for adapting to a new culture, passion for educating amidst challenges, and pursuit for independence and self-growth.

Teaching abroad as life’s turning point can be considered a decision rooted in the numerous encounters of the teachers from

Table 1
Thematic analysis of the voice of Filipino early childhood education teachers in Singapore

Theme Clusters	Emergent Themes
Attractive remuneration packages Desire to have supportive and compassionate leaders Local teaching encounters as stimuli in working overseas Optimistic regard in adapting new culture Passion for educating amidst challenges Pursuit of independence and self-growth	Teaching abroad as life's turning point—Decision
The desire for familial affection Differences in ECE programs and practices Disparities in language and culture Independent living takes discipline Unfamiliarity with some assessment practices	Rigors of working abroad—Realities
Cultivation of one's spiritual dimension Dynamism in adapting cultural barriers Learning the art of teaching by heart Local teaching experience as a springboard for a seamless transition Strong stance on working overseas Teachers' positive regard for the profession	Optimistic regard for adverse experiences—Conviction
Academic preparation Adjustment in teaching pedagogy for multicultural setting Awareness of the international education paradigm Bringing forth the theory into practice	Necessities for a successful pursuit—Fundamentals
An experience of a new place Professional development from international encounters Sharing the experience when coming back home	Echoing the overseas journey upon return—Impact

their personal and professional endeavors. Firstly, teachers revealed that they need to be practical as they have financial obligations to fulfill for their families; hence, the attractive remuneration packages encouraged them to teach in Singapore.

“From a practical and direct point of view, it offers an attractive compensation. When you are young

and endowed with aspirations for yourself and family, you want to earn a decent amount to fulfill these.” (p2)

To Uytico and Abadiano (2020) and Sumalinog (2020), financial growth was a driving force since assisting family members back home was necessary. They have families to tend to, needs to fulfill,

investments to undertake, businesses to start, and siblings to educate. Secondly, teachers also desired to have supportive and compassionate leaders that would provide an objective professional development plan since this boosts teachers' enthusiasm and productivity at work.

Also, teachers have experienced undesirable local teaching encounters such as out-of-field teaching and unsupportive leaders who are inappropriately implementing early childhood practices in the Philippines.

"Being in Singapore for almost 3 years was indeed enriching because I've been given a lot of courses/ training which made me enhance my knowledge and skills. It has perks that, like any other first-world country, undeniably support your personal and professional growth." (p12)

"I handled higher elementary students in the Philippines, and it was more on a traditional set-up. I wanted to challenge myself to try teaching in a foreign country that has childcare set up wherein you need to feed, shower, and get them to sleep for the whole day." (p1)

Altun (2015) expressed that teachers are motivated to experience supportive working environments and leaders. While overseas, teachers participate in workshops and improve teaching strategies provided by their administrators. They can also work

with local teachers and gain new skills because of their encounters.

In a multicultural country Singapore, teachers have shown optimistic regard in adapting to a new culture and upheld their passion for teaching amidst challenges. The willingness to adapt to a new culture despite its adversities has helped them thrive while working and living in a foreign country.

"I had to learn their way of speaking since Singapore is a multicultural society made up of different races, languages, and religions. Being receptive to new learnings and flexible to changes will bring you an extra mile". (p11)

"It was very challenging at first because I was designated in a childcare center and assigned in toddler class during my first 3 months which I didn't have any hands-on experience, especially in terms of childcare service (e.g., proper diaper changing, bathing, preparing milk and timing, etc.). Aside from that, I was also adjusting and coping with their culture. Nevertheless, it was a humble fulfillment as I was able to cope with and learn more of their curriculum/education system". (p5)

To Hultquist (2007), by working abroad, these teachers strengthen their cultural sensitivity and recognize the context of their students, particularly international students in their classes. In this study,

teachers stated that this experience was a learning opportunity to grasp and appreciate new educational paradigms. For them, the job can be taxing at times, but it is also a rewarding experience in different spheres of their lives. Further, teachers deemed teaching overseas as a pathway in the pursuit of independence.

“I grabbed the opportunity for me to widen my perspective and to grow as an effective and efficient educator.” (p9)

“I want to broaden my horizons and grow as a person, to grow independently, be strong in terms of decision-making, letting myself more fully realize who I am, where I come from, and what can I contribute to the children develop holistically.” (p10)

Working in another country helps increase teachers' confidence and self-reliance, tolerance for others and knowledge of and respect for others' perspectives. They are adaptive to their immediate environment and exhibit composure when conversing with others (Serin, 2017). Teachers pursue working abroad since this increases autonomy in defining, implementing, and assessing their life goals. Consequently, there is an increase in self-growth.

It can be construed that working abroad is not just fueled by a single reason. It is a conglomeration of whys and wherefores that ignited the teachers to reach a certain decision. One's rationale for working in a

foreign country must not be solely anchored on the idea of having high compensation only. It requires an individual to possess the optimism to accomplish the job productively, the passion for continuing amid inevitable challenges, and the desire for independence and self-growth while in a foreign land. Hence, teaching abroad is considered life's turning point.

Theme 2: Rigors of Working Abroad — Realities

In this study, teachers articulated that there are various rigors of working abroad and these represent the realities that they experience in their day-to-day life in a foreign country, i.e., the desire for familial affection, differences in early childhood education programs and practices, disparities in language and culture, the need for discipline in independent living, and unfamiliarity with some assessment practices in school.

Aside from the benefits of living in a developed and progressive country, they also experience challenging situations that they must overcome to attain their goals. Firstly, teachers desire familial affection, as observed in the following statement.

“I believe the distance has been a major obstacle. It separates you from your life back at home.” (p1)

Similar to the study of Gül and Gökçe (2020), participants reported that making acquaintances in the nation where they work was challenging, especially with the locals. Besides, they only formed acquaintances

inside the professional network, which is usually short-lived. It stresses the importance of having affection from friends and family to provide emotional support. In this study, teachers articulated a comparable predicament that distance has been a major obstacle since it separates you from your life in your home country.

The respondents also mentioned that differences in ECE programs and practices are prevalent since the curriculum focuses more on self-help skills than academics.

“It’s different when you teach ECE in Singapore. You must adjust to their culture and their curriculum. The focus is not on academics but more on self-help skills. Students stay in school for the whole day, and we do everything about childcare.” (p7)

“They use Authentic Assessment of Teaching where it demonstrates what a student learns in class rather than the student’s ability to do well on traditional tests and quizzes.” (p12)

“Early childhood education programs and policies are appropriately funded, implemented, and monitored by ECDA. Low-income families are subsidized.” (p5)

Disparities in culture and language are also evident. For example, teachers struggle to communicate with parents who are not proficient in English.

“Since Singapore is a multiracial country, you can encounter parents/colleagues that cannot express themselves well in English.” (p7)

“Sometimes, I encounter misunderstanding with the parents and administrators because of the differences in the culture so I think it is always better to have an open mind and show respect to other cultures as well.” (p2)

Due to differences in cultures, there are times that teachers encounter misunderstandings with their administrators too. Guvendir (2017) and Ozdemir et al. (2015) mentioned that when teachers relocate to another country, one of the most common challenges they face is adapting to unfamiliar setting. Teachers unfamiliar with the cultural identity of the place where they teach and operate in a constrained social environment struggle to have a sense of belonging to that place and the institution where they work. To Halicioglu (2015), such duties and expectations were desired by teachers to obtain international experience and understand the culture. However, no matter how prepared they are for their mission overseas, cultural shock is inevitable. In this study, teachers stressed that having an open mind and respect for differences helped them reorganize their views toward diversity. Therefore, cross-cultural education is advocated to bridge the cultural divide by teaching expatriates the critical information they may utilize while on assignment abroad. Further, it assists the

individual in being better acquainted with the cultural context, which will aid them in managing their expectations and encounters while teaching in a foreign country.

Teachers also revealed that living independently takes discipline.

“One must have prepared financial management skills and plan your budget as the cost of living is high. I need to look after myself responsibly.” (p13)

Teachers must consider that one of the prime reasons for working overseas is to have financial stability and better life conditions (Frederiksen, 2014). Aside from looking after oneself responsibly, one needs to have good financial management skills as the cost of living is high in Singapore; hence, one must practice this skill maturely. Teachers also cited unfamiliarity with some assessment practices as one of their significant challenges.

“I have less exposure to making anecdotal records, incident reports, and making portfolio assessments of children while in the Philippines. I wasn't exposed to Singapore's actual classroom set-up for both childcare and kindergarten such as having the six learning domains in setting up the classroom environment while in the Philippines.” (p8)

Teachers quipped that they have not as much exposure when assessing children authentically through online portfolio assessment. Aside from that, teachers did

not have a thorough preparation regarding childcare, a significant component in early childhood education practice in Singapore's educational system. Though teachers have limited orientation about these educational practices in Singapore, to Shiveley and Misco (2015), teaching in another country increases a teacher's global understanding of the importance of teaching. Since they experience a new culture, teachers become more receptive and analytical about educational processes and renounce their dogmatic views. Teachers who teach in a foreign nation enhance their pedagogical knowledge by allowing their students to grasp diverse views and issues from varied perspectives. It can also be gleaned that teachers with international experience can better appreciate diverse cultures and identify the flaws and strengths of their educational systems in their home country.

Theme 3: Optimistic Regard for Adverse Experiences— Conviction

Revealed in this study are the optimistic regard for adverse experiences that reinforce teachers' conviction to thrive in working overseas, namely: cultivation of one's spiritual dimension, dynamism in adapting to cultural barriers, learning the art of teaching by heart, local teaching experience as a springboard for a seamless transition, strong stance in working overseas, and teachers' positive regard for the profession.

In this study, it was unveiled that the cultivation of one's spiritual dimension can help one to stay grounded no matter the

difficulties one encounters in their personal and professional life abroad.

“You must be strong enough to handle problems and face them because no one will help you, only yourself. You need to be spiritually connected with God because in times of trouble. He is the only one who will make you feel okay and relaxed. Believe in Him.” (p9)

Clemens (2014) supported this finding in his study. He stated that being away from home for a considerable time developed some stressors and triggered anxiety since this experience can be isolating and upsetting in numerous ways. They embraced spiritual coping mechanisms to overcome feelings of separation, misery, frustration, and homesickness.

In terms of the adjustment to the changes in the educational practice brought about by the multiracial context of Singapore, teachers’ dynamism in adapting to cultural barriers is necessitated.

“Singapore has been adapting more to British customs and this country is multiracial due to the expatriates. In this manner, diversity in teaching is more practiced and exposed where respect for ways, customs, and celebration of multicultural events are all highlighted. Thus, making the teaching more dynamic in nature.” (p8)

Gul and Gokce (2020) stated that working in a foreign educational setting

with different regulations also produces concerns with adaptation. Participants said they struggled to adjust to education and school culture for a long time, owing to a lack of prior understanding regarding student and parent demographics. Thus, it can be suggested that teachers must have a proper and intensive orientation on a certain country’s background and cultural practices before deployment. To lessen the burden on teachers in adapting to the norms of the host country, they need to prepare themselves for the tendencies that might happen and deal with them proactively.

Apart from that, teachers stated that learning the art of teaching by heart and developing parent relations techniques can help you propel your teaching job in Singapore.

“Continue to learn more different teaching styles, strategies, and approaches in teaching. One must also learn some techniques to communicate with parents from varied races, like Singaporeans, Malays, Indonesians, Chinese, Indians, and many more.” (p11)

To Serin (2017), teachers at the core of education must respond appropriately to their students’ learning requirements; thus, knowing their students’ language, being aware of their cultural values, and promoting learning-friendly attitudes are all vital. Therefore, it is suggested that, since the children are still too young, a constant collaborative effort between the school and the home needs to be in place to track the child’s development carefully.

This study also revealed that local teaching experience as a springboard for a seamless transition, especially in a multiracial classroom or an international school, can be good exposure and an edge so one can seamlessly adapt to teaching overseas.

“I worked in a private school in Cebu City (Philippines) that catered to international children who are Korean and Chinese by race but were born in the Philippines. This experience made me well-prepared to teach in Singapore, for I knew that the country was also multiracial. I already expected to have different races in my class.” (p12)

DeVillar and Jiang (2012) mentioned that having relative experience is critical for educators to recognize the values and beliefs of children from various cultural backgrounds to train them effectively and efficiently.

Additionally, it requires a strong stance in working overseas since teachers will be detached from their families in the Philippines. No matter the circumstances, ECE teachers need to have a conviction to carry out the expectations of the job.

“It takes true dedication and compassion to be a preschool teacher in Singapore. You’ll be spending most of your time with the same group of children.” (p4)

“I must brace myself for the greater responsibilities as well as the

obstacles that I will face as I enter a foreign country. I must emotionally and mentally train myself.” (p1)

Halicioglu (2015) explained that an individual’s capacity to manage well with multicultural situations is influenced by his or her personality. As a result, the teacher’s attributes might be detrimental if they are not favorable to assist her in making the essential changes to her transfer overseas. Curiosity matters and this encompasses a willingness to learn a foreign language, which helps with cross-cultural adaptation and demonstrates a better perception of the host country. If teachers do not possess “a tolerance for ambiguity,” they will have difficulty teaching in other countries.

In this study, it was also revealed that positive regard for the profession fuels the motivation of the teachers.

“I was able to gain experience in working with young children with their artistic hands and little toes. I was able to see the value of each child and how children enjoy exploring the world. I learned how important a role and an influential person a teacher is in students’ life.” (p13)

Valuing the teaching role helps them appreciate the unfolding beauty of the children’s development. As an outcome, teachers can feel they have a vital role to play, which may increase their strong sense of purpose. To Utumapu-McBride (2013), teachers who understand the needs and upbringings of their students are excellent.

Empowering learners start with recognizing what they can provide to the classroom and then utilizing culturally relevant approaches to link and develop their potential to achieve their studies. To preserve that foundation and professionalism, teachers must continually evolve their work in response to input from others (such as students and colleagues).

Theme 4: Necessities for a Successful Pursuit — Fundamentals

In this study, ECE teachers revealed that there are necessities to pursue working abroad successfully. These are the fundamentals for teachers to thrive in an international teaching arena, namely: academic preparation, awareness of the international education paradigm, an adjustment in teaching pedagogy, and bringing forth theory into practice.

The pathways to overseas teaching may lead to achievement or disappointment, thereby considered an uncertain undertaking. However, the participants in this study revealed necessities for a successful pursuit which they appraised as the fundamentals for a seamless transition to a foreign country.

The participants mentioned that relevant academic preparation is key in jumpstarting their careers as ECE teachers in Singapore.

“Relevant academic preparation in the University plays an important role as it helps us be open to the different school settings/curriculum in every part of the world.” (p2)

“As a foreigner, to be a successful ECE teacher in Singapore, you will

need to have a Diploma/Certificate in Early Childhood Education and a language proficiency test such as IELTS.” (p5)

Teachers mentioned that university programs provided them with theoretical and practical knowledge of early childhood education that is valuable in their job. Passing a language proficiency test such as IELTS can also be an edge for teachers over other aspirants to obtain a teaching job in Singapore easily. The education ministry in Singapore sets an unbending standard since they believe, according to Karuppiah (2021), teachers with greater credentials and particular expertise in childhood development are more likely to execute optimal quality early childhood programs. Interactions between the teacher and children proved to be a vital process indicator that underpins the quality of students’ learning experiences. The quality learning interactions are anchored on the professionalism and competence of the ECE teachers, along with their backgrounds, values, and principles.

Teachers disclosed that adjustment in teaching pedagogy for multicultural settings is necessitated since the preschool curriculum in Singapore is contrary to the academic-focused curriculum in schools that they have experienced in the Philippines.

“I also realized that I needed to think of more activities to engage the children of various races due to the play-based and authentic-based approaches in the curriculum here in Singapore.” (p6)

With the presence of various races in the classroom in Singapore, teachers' creativity is sought to cater to their needs using play and authentic-based approaches, which they must implement. In addition, to Yang and Peh (2021), a context-relevant strategy is essential to enhance students' learning experiences in educational settings. Set in the specific setting of Singapore, teachers are challenged to design curricular experiences that meet the socio-cultural realities.

The participants in this study stressed that awareness of the international education paradigm is beneficial for teachers as they venture overseas teaching.

"Study, learn, and be exposed to Singapore's actual classroom set-up for both childcare and kindergarten such as having the six learning domains in setting up the classroom environment." (p8)

"I think that universities should begin thinking of ways on how to collaborate with the preschool governing body in Singapore (like ECDA) or maybe with preschools in Singapore. They can come up with a student exchange program or maybe a tour for a few days/weeks which can serve as an orientation, whereby aspiring ECE teachers can have an opportunity to learn the Singapore curriculum even before they think of working here." (p10)

Familiarizing the Singaporean ECE curriculum and the learning domains in

setting up the classroom environment can be an advantage before coming and immersing in the teaching job. Teachers also highlighted and hoped that higher education institutions in the Philippines might consider benchmarking or collaborating with the preschools in Singapore and have Student Exchange programs to give Filipino teachers a glimpse of the best teaching practices in Singapore. This finding proved to be similar to the study of Sumalinog (2020) on Filipino teachers abroad, where the teachers saw the need for international internships to be embedded in the curricular offering of the Philippines. In addition, to Kabilan (2013), pre-service teachers benefit greatly from such exposure in terms of expanding their skills and expertise, developing their ideologies and thus their cross-cultural effectivity, coping with new environments, gaining a global outlook, and increasing independence, self-confidence, and quality of life.

According to the participants, bringing theory into practice significantly aided them in being successful ECE teachers in Singapore.

"We are exposed to a variety of languages, allowing us to become acquainted with our students' cultures while also learning from them. Furthermore, the school provided us with the autonomy to explore what a preschool should be like, from hands-on experiences to authentic assessments." (p1)

Unlike their experience in their home country, the Philippines, where they were

constrained to the academic-focused practice in their schools, in Singapore, teachers are given the autonomy and the materials to conduct authentic assessments and practice the theories and principles of ECE more concretely. The promotion of authentic evaluation is in line with Singapore's objective of steering away from "quantity to quality." To shift a curriculum from a concentration on "quantity" to an emphasis on "quality," students must demonstrate "maturity" in "taking ownership" of their learning and teachers must "let go" of their achievements (Koh et al., 2012).

Theme 5: Echoing the Overseas Journey Upon Return — Impact

In the current study, the Filipino ECE teachers in Singapore are motivated to echo their overseas journey upon return to their home country. It underpins the impact they have experienced in living and working in a foreign country, such as their experience of a new place, professional development from international encounters, and their interest in sharing their experience when coming back home.

In this study, teachers stressed that one of the highlights of their journey is the experience of the new place.

"The environment is clean, beautiful, and safe as they have tighter laws implemented in Singapore." (p8)

"... teaching here in Singapore will be one of the steppingstones to teach and apply to other countries

such as Canada, New Zealand, and other countries." (p9)

According to the participants, Singapore has a conducive environment that is clean, beautiful, and, most importantly, safe because of the laws being implemented. The participants also regarded working in Singapore as a gateway to working in other well-developed countries. Several studies corroborate this finding that teachers sought to encounter new people from all walks of life, experience new cuisines and flavors, and travel to interesting areas close to their locations. As a result, teachers choose to live autonomously for personal growth and obtain teaching experience in a multicultural setting (Online English Teaching Jobs, n.d.; Uytico & Abadiano, 2020).

Additionally, the participants claimed they gained professional development from international encounters.

"Teaching abroad helps me to immerse new culture while gaining professional skills. I gained more opportunities by meeting new people, learning international work experience, and even getting out of my comfort zone." (p6)

"We are exposed to a variety of languages, allowing us to become acquainted with our students' cultures while also learning from them." (p1)

The participants simply obtained more opportunities by meeting new people, getting international work experience, and

even getting out of their comfort zones like exploring new hobbies and learning new skills. Participants are not only immersed in a new culture but they are also exposed to and eventually learn foreign languages. To Zayed (2018), regardless of the difficulties, teaching in a new place provides much sense of satisfaction that money cannot compensate for. The experience satisfied the desire to try something new and the ambition to make the most of it. To Shiveley and Misco (2015), besides professional growth and classroom experience, personal enrichment was a significant opportunity for teachers. This experience allows the teacher to understand better foreign cultures and the strong points and flaws of their own country's educational systems.

Further, it was revealed in this study that teachers are determined to share their experiences when coming back home.

“I enhanced my knowledge about the different techniques in handling small children, preparing materials for a classroom set up, and preparation of corners which we can share to our home country.”
(p13)

Teachers' pedagogical expertise was developed to be keen to share their insights if given a chance in the Philippines. From the accounts of Serin (2017), educators with international experience seem to be more motivated to learn about other cultures and have a more favorable yet critical perspective toward their homeland. They acknowledge that the foreign curriculum has the potential

to generate new learning resources and knowledge. By obtaining new ideas for curricular improvement, teachers working overseas may play a part in education and learning in their home countries. At a certain time, they may implement the relevant aspects of the international curriculum in their own countries.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, Filipino ECE teachers' experience in teaching overseas can be considered their life's turning point. In other words, it is a decision rooted in various motives such as an attractive salary and other benefits, the desire to have a supportive working environment, interest in working in a new culture, and the pursuit of independence and self-growth. There are also rigors of working abroad that can be characterized as the realities of their overseas journey. Some of these are the desire for familial affection, disparities in language, culture, and ECE practices, and the practice of discipline and responsibility while living independently. However, the participants demonstrate optimistic regard for the adverse experiences that mirror their conviction by cultivating their spirituality, dynamism in adapting to cultural barriers, learning the art of teaching by heart, using the local teaching experience for a seamless transition to the new workplace, having strong conviction to work overseas, and manifesting positive outlook for the teaching profession. Teachers also considered some necessities for a successful pursuit that can be construed as the fundamentals in their

journey teaching overseas. These are the relevant academic preparation and passing an English language proficiency test like IELTS, contextualizing the pedagogy for multicultural setting, being aware of the international education paradigm, and ascertaining that teaching theory in ECE are reflected in practice. From these experiences, teachers desired to echo their overseas journey upon their return should they be given a chance. The impact of teaching abroad since they got to experience a multicultural place helped them develop professionally through the various international encounters.

It can be construed that the Filipino ECE teachers' experience in a foreign country, no matter the adversaries, has resulted in favorable outcomes and valuable life encounters that developed their professional, personal, and economic facets of life. This study provides the frame of reference for teachers who wish to venture overseas teaching on the circumstances they might encounter, whether on the personal or professional level. It also sheds light on the education department's efforts to strengthen the current educational system by highlighting the ECE programs and services while internationalizing early childhood education programs at higher education institutions. Further, this can provide a rationale for the kind of support and policies that the Commission on Higher Education and other government offices can craft so that Filipino teachers can be more successful and adaptive in a foreign country.

IMPLICATIONS

With the dearth of literature regarding foreign ECE teachers in different countries, this research has put the life of Filipino ECE teachers in Singapore into perspective. These encounters mirrored the various opportunities and challenged Filipino educators working in a foreign setting faced. Primarily, it can help teachers prepare for international teaching careers, adapt to socio-cultural norms, and learn about the host country. Further, this could also be a benchmark to help the Philippines' education department improve the present educational system and internationalize the practices of early childhood education programs in higher education institutions. Finally, future studies on overseas teaching could be expanded to other areas, such as preserving teachers' professional identities while learning and adapting to the foreign countries' norms and practices. In addition, investigating how the foreign environment affects other outcomes, such as educators' job satisfaction and future career endeavors, is also recommended. As a result, new viewpoints and intelligent debates in the academic community can be sparked if desired.

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