

Experiences of the Filipino Teachers in the Virgin Islands: A Phenomenological Theory Development

Mervin T. Arcillo

University of the Visayas

Corresponding Author: [mervinarcillo\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:mervinarcillo[at]gmail.com)

Abstract: *The lived experiences of Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands are investigated in this phenomenological study. The study also looked at the difficulties they encountered and how Filipino teachers overcome them to continue to give their students a high - quality education. A qualitative phenomenological research approach with theory generating was employed for this investigation. According to the themes that emerged, the Filipino teachers' lived experiences revolved around the difficulties they faced while teaching outside the country; teachers struggled to manage students' behavior while being away from their families. Teachers developed coping mechanisms in order to adapt to the new eco - ecological set - up and maintain a sound mindset in order to enjoy teaching on the island. It was also revealed that teachers were subjected to close administrative supervision, that they had a minimal workload and were well compensated. Despite this, Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands adapted to the major crisis and even used it to grow and develop as educators. In terms of findings, the New - Ecological Acclimatization theory was developed.*

Keywords: Filipino Teachers in US Virgin Islands, Teachers lived experiences, Phenomenological research, New - Ecological Acclimatization Theory.

1. Introduction

The globalization brings about substantial change in the world (Falk, 2015 as cited in Uytico, 2020). There has already been international policies regarding exchange workers around the world. Globalization extended its reach to education. The different schools and institutions have become more open to the foreign teachers and as well as learners (Uytico, 2020).

Educators from the Philippines have been venturing in teaching abroad. Young Filipino teachers are exploring this opportunity through the J1 and H1B visas (Uytico, 2020). These teachers usually comes from the private and public schools of the Philippines.

The increasing number of teachers abroad is high (Modesto, 2020). Thus the Philippine government must also look into the reasons why they have been considering this opportunity. Moreover, it is also important to assess their working conditions and the different opportunities that they may have on their new teacher post.

In the qualitative study of (Uytico, 2020), it suggests the grounded theory on the goal - attitude - adaptation: keys to survival of teachers abroad. It presents a way of life in teaching abroad as it supports the principles of Filipino teachers facing each day with a positive mindset. Amidst the different adjustments and separation anxiety that Filipino teaches need to deal, they managed to keep going and excel in their different institutions.

A study on the Flipino teachers in South Texans also affirms that Filipino teachers have embraced their roles and new teaching posts. They have also been considered as positive influencers in the schools that they are assigned to teach (Modesto, 2020).

Thus, this study aims to ascertain the quality of working life among the Filipino Teachers abroad. It also endeavored to assess the general working conditions of overseas Filipino teachers. The results of this findings can be shared to both departments od education in the Philippines and abroad in order to look into the current working conditions of Filipino teachers. This can also help in determining the success of different teacher exchange programs and how can the department of education in the Philippines move forward in terms of keeping the competent teachers working abroad.

Domain of Inquiry:

This study explores Filipino teachers' lives in the US Virgin Islands. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the experiences of Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands?
- 2) What are the significant themes that can be formulated from the experiences of Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands?
- 3) What theory can be developed based on the experiences of Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands?

2. Literature Review

Based on the study of Batayola (2021), there are 4.2 million Filipinos living in the United States as of 2019, making them the third - largest Asian - origin group in the country. Immigration has always been essential to the survival of societies and cultures. The values and artifacts that permeate and exist throughout these cultures and societies as a result of migration are unquestionably what maintain the majority of them competitive in a global market (Roces, 2015; San Juan, 2009). One of the nations that people aspire to visit is the United States. Its desires echo the American ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They are motivated by a desire to potentially meet their demands and obtain financial and economic stability that has never been possible in their own countries. Some of them discover educational

independence for themselves. People in America come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, races, faiths, and sexual preferences. Additionally, it is socially acceptable and not viewed negatively. Some immigrants get advantages from the cultural norms and artifacts they acquire from their host society, which they employ to develop their talents and skills and forge a distinct cultural identity. Filipino immigrant workers who live and work in the Virgin Islands of the United States are one group that exhibits such an identity.

The belief that teachers' experience has little affect on their efficacy after two or three years at the beginning of their careers has dominated most research and policymaking in the USA in recent years (Rice, 2013). As an illustration, a policy brief highlighting the advantages of teaching experience in US schools was published in 2010 and stated that "[teachers] demonstrate the highest productivity improvements during their first few years on the job, after which their performance tends to level off" (Rice, 2013). This frequently results in the assumption that efforts to make policy that could aim to retain teachers in the classroom longer would be of little use. There is disagreement over whether teachers continue to grow as they get more classroom experience, despite the fact that the research and policy communities agree that teachers improve quickly early in their careers (Grossman et al. 2014; Harris 2014; Sandilos 2019; Rockoff and Speroni 2011).

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There is disagreement over whether teachers continue to learn as they gain more classroom experience, despite the fact that the research and policy communities generally agree that teachers improve quickly early in their careers (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, and Wyckoff, 2008; Harris 2011).

Although many Filipinos are aware of the proven hardships faced by Filipino teachers hoping to find better opportunities in US public school systems, they continue to pay thousands of dollars and run the risk of becoming victims of human trafficking in order to do so (Perea, 2018; Piccio, 2019). Many believe that the good impression that American colonialism and lifestyle have left in the minds of many Filipinos—that American culture is far superior to their own, and that American ideals and artifacts are premium—is the reason why employment in the United States is so highly desired. This phenomenon has been referred to as colonial mentality by academics. "Colonial mindset refers to the belief that any American or Western cultural ideals, actions, physical appearance, and objects [are] connected with

superiority, pleasantness, or desirability" (David & Okazaki, 2010, p.850).

As a result, many Filipinos believe that the cultural identity of Americans is superior than their own. However, given that Filipinos are reputed to be one of the minority groups who easily adapt to Western cultures, some may view this information as advantageous (Aguila, 2015, p.63). However, as a Filipino seeks to define herself or himself, such a mindset can also give rise to tensions and conflicts inside the persona, which could contribute to mental health stress and influence student performance in the classroom and their formation. Colonial mentality is a two - edged sword that can either support Filipinos in their search for their own identities or be a gloomy pit to fall into (David & Nadal, 2013; San Juan, 2009).

3. Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological design with theory development was chosen for this study in order to better understand what teachers experience in regard to a common phenomenon, which for this study is the lived experiences of the Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands. Phenomenology focuses on the investigation of experience from the viewpoint of the individual, "bracketing" presumptions and conventional modes of perception. Furthermore, theories offer a lens into a phenomenon and that they are better or worse for a certain purpose rather than necessarily being correct or wrong.

Role of the Researchers

Interviewing the informants is the responsibility of the researchers in order to gather the essential data. By doing this, it is made sure that the chosen informants have given their agreement and accepted to be questioned voluntarily. Regardless of their responses, the informants were treated with profound understanding, sensitivity, and consideration throughout the research process. Generally speaking, a researcher's task is to elicit information through interviews. The researchers also served as the data's encoder, coder, and interpreter.

Informants

Six (6) Filipino teachers from the US Virgin Islands were chosen as research informants; three (3) of them were men and (3) were women. The request to include teachers in the research study was well received. Selection was influenced by the desire to achieve representation of a wide array of teaching experiences and different levels, and preference was given to those who had demonstrated an interest in or found anything engaging.

Data Gathering Procedure

Formal structured interviews were conducted for each participant at the beginning of the study. Each participant's interview lasted approximately 30 minutes each. The interviews were conducted at the classroom of each respected teachers. Sample questions asked during the formal interviews included: What are the challenges experienced as a Filipino teacher in the US Virgin Islands? What significant themes can be described out from the

experiences identified? What theory can be developed based on the significant themes created? Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions: What are the challenges experienced as a Filipino teacher in the US Virgin Islands? How do you cope with challenges experienced in the foreign land? What memorable experiences, do you have during your first few years of teaching here in the United States? How would you compare them with your experiences back in the Philippines? Participants were given the opportunity to schedule their observations at their convenience and in settings conducive for them. Each participant was observed twice. During the process of observation, extensive field notes were taken. Those notes included participants' experiences, description of the environment where the informants are teaching, and how the informants were actively or inactively involved her new working environment.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the different steps in analyzing the data using the descriptive phenomenology as cited by Collaizi (1778). The process begins with becoming familiar with the data collected. To do this, the research will immerse herself with the data through reading the narratives several times and then will construct the profiles. The next step will be finding significant statements and formulating meanings. Then, the researcher clusters the identified meanings into themes that are common across all accounts. The researcher writes a full and inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes produced. The researcher also condenses the exhaustive description down to a short, dense statement that captures just those aspects deemed to be essential to the structure of the phenomenon. There will be two (2) batches of people that will serve as the validators of the participants' feedbacks to refrain from biases and to provide very reliable information. The use of triangulation

will also be used to cross - check the trustworthiness of the data.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Consideration

Considering that all of the information will remain the same, the researchers used the informants' responses to determine the genuine image of the phenomena in terms of trustworthiness. Additionally, by following the advised processes for conducting the study, the researchers ensure reliability. Another is confirmability; rest comfortable that when performing this investigation, the informants' opinions were taken into account in relation to the researchers' point of view. By demonstrating readers that the findings of the phenomenological investigation will be applicable to numerous contexts, circumstances, periods, and groups of individuals, the researchers further illustrated the transferability.

A confidentiality clause was considered informing the participant that their names would not be used in the written reports. Participants were informed that the recordings of the interviews would be held confidential and would only be heard by a third - party.

4. Result

The US Virgin Islands teachers discussed their personal narratives and experiences in teaching the US Virgin Islands Students. These mentioned teachers from US Virgin Islands, who teach Kindergarten to Senior High students, specifically disclosed their experiences, coping strategies, and what they believe to be the essence of those experiences.

Table 1 shows the informants information in tabular form.

Table 1: Informants Information

Pseudonym	Information
<i>Teacher Fighter</i>	Has 1 year and two months of teaching experience in the US Virgin Islands. He was an elementary public school teacher in the Philippines and a teacher in the special education department of The VIDE. Currently working his master's degree in English language teaching. So far he is enjoying teaching in the US Virgin Islands.
<i>Teacher Happy</i>	Has 1 year of teaching experience in the US Virgin Islands. She was an elementary public school teacher in the Philippines and a teacher in the elementary education department of The VIDE. So far she is enjoying teaching in the US Virgin Islands.
<i>Teacher Undecided</i>	Has 1 year of teaching experience in the US Virgin Islands. She was a secondary public school teacher in the Philippines and a Math teacher in high school department of The VIDE. So far she is still weighing things if she is enjoying or not in teaching in the US Virgin Islands.
<i>Teacher Miss Match</i>	Has 1 year an 1 month teaching experience in the US virgin Islands. He was a math elementary public school teacher in the Philippines and an English teacher in the High School department of The VIDE. So far he is enjoying teaching in the US Virgin Islands.
<i>Teacher Musician</i>	Has 1 year and one - month teaching experience in the US Virgin Islands. She was an elementary public school teacher in the Philippines and a Music teacher in the elementary education department of The VIDE. So far she is enjoying teaching in the US Virgin Islands.
<i>Teacher Hard - Working</i>	Has 1 year of teaching experience in the US Virgin Islands. She was an Instructor in a state university in the Philippines and a Social Studies teacher in the Middle School department of The VIDE. Currently working his Doctor's degree in Leadership and management. So far she is still weighing things if she is enjoying or not in teaching in the US Virgin Islands.

The themes generated were anchored from the Research Questions (RQ) below and the result is presented in Table 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. There were one (1) major themes emerged for RQ1, two (2) for RQ2, one (1) for RQ3, and alsotwo (2) for RQ4 out from the data collected.

Table 2: Essential Themes and Thematic Statements on the Research Question

RQ1: What are the challenges experienced as a Filipino teacher in the US Virgin Islands??

Essential Themes	Thematic Statements
Struggling Filipino Teachers in USVI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being away from your family • Language barrier, classroom management • Attitudes of students and students behavior • Managing misbehaving students, • Getting them acquainted with the lesson • Students who do not recognize your authority as a teacher in the classroom • The students will really test you and push you to the limit

Theme 1: Struggling Filipino Teachers in USVI

Pickering (2008) stressed that teachers face a variety of challenges, including new teaching load, inclusive students, student misbehavior, far from the home country and the need for ongoing improvement. Many teachers deal with the same concerns, despite the fact that they differ from region to region and from school to school. Thus, Toker - Gökçe (2013) explained that the undesirable aspects of the area where the school is located cause issues that teachers may experience when beginning their careers.

Managing misbehaving students, getting them acquainted with the lesson, encouraging them to like/love reading, making them realize their purpose of going to school, delivering some lessons. (I3)

Students' rude behavior and the school culture that is different from the Philippines. (I5)

Table 3: Essential Themes and Thematic Statements on the Research Question

RQ2: What are their coping mechanisms?

Essential Themes	Thematic Statements
Adapting to New - Working Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant communication to the heads and co teachers • Gradual adaptation. • Adjustment period is always the hardest. • Knowing other cultures and getting to adopt the way of living and lifestyle of the islanders here in the USVI.
Sound Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to be tough at all times • Travel • Knowing that hard times doesn't last. • Being flexible and be positive • Finding time to relax and enjoy

Theme2: Adapting to New Working Environment

Teachers must concurrently acclimate to probable loneliness, being away from loved ones, and learning a new culture. The educational environment of a teacher is automatically impacted by all the cultural factors that have an impact on daily life in a new nation. Every instructor responds differently, with some accepting the culture while others reject it (Grimes, 2010). According to Fallaria et al., (2018) Filipinos are known for having an environment that is incredibly tough, therefore they constantly demonstrate the value of resilience.

Talk to the heads and co teachers, talking to students privately, finding time to relax and enjoy. (I1)

Always give time to my - self for gradual adaptation (I6)

Theme 3: Sound Mindset

There are several mental, emotional, and physical advantages of having sound mindset. Additionally, a positive outlook can improve teachers general welfare, help them deal with stress, and even strengthen their immune systems. The research have also demonstrated that a teacher's capacity for problem - solving and adapttaion can be affected by their outlook on life. Positive thinking essentially helps teachers feel more at ease and content, which in turn makes it simpler for them to effectively work and understand new teaching environment (Singh, 2022).

Being flexible and be positive, Travel, trying to be tough at all times, Finding time for myself. (I2)

Knowing that hard times doesn't last. Adjustment period is always the hardest. (I4)

Teachers that care about fostering a sound mindset learning environment go above and beyond to make them feel supported and engaged. Thus, teachers are less stress make them more productive in their work and raise their energies in addition to learning.

Table 4: Essential Themes and Thematic Statements on the Research Question

RQ3: What memorable experiences, do you have during your first few years of teaching here in the United States?

Essential Themes	Thematic Statements
Administrative Reinforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciated by the administrators • Having a para - teacher in the classroom • Administrators are always ready to help • Professional development every month • Administrators will handle students misbehaving students. • They molded me to become the better version of myself.

Theme4: Administrative Reinforcement

Administrative support continues to be essential for a lot of reasons. First, administrative assistance has a good correlation with teacher's performance and helps teachers feel fulfilled (Olsen & Huang, 2018). Billingsley et al. (2020) showed that teachers reported working in supportive working environments derived from supportive leadership when asked about factors related to teachers' job satisfaction. Second, this support helped teachers stay in their existing teaching positions and had an impact on their general level of satisfaction (Conley and You, 2017)

The feeling of being appreciated by some of my Administrators. They will really support and push you to the limit. (I1)

The Administrator helps us understand cultures and getting to adopt the way of living and lifestyle of the islanders here in the USVI by exposing us through series of professional development and studies. (I6)

For the past three decades, administrative reinforcement has been universally regarded as having a favorable impact on literature. Administrative assistance, in general, is defined as actions that promote teacher collaboration (Ax et al., 2001), growth possibilities and encouragement. This encouraging atmosphere is created by the building - level administration and has an impact on all other aspects of the development of the teachers especially if they are still new to the working environment.

RQ4: How would you compare them with your experiences back in the Philippines??

Table 5: Essential Themes and Thematic Statements on the Research Question

Essential Themes	Thematic Statements
Minimal Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less paper works • Having a preparation time • Less number of students • Tons of paper works in Philippines • US, the only paper work I get to prepare are the students worksheets. • Report cards are done by the office • We are not super exhausted with school work here. • More pleasant teaching experience
Well Compensated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get to travel to other states and • Earn more money and save. • Literally enjoy life.

Theme 4: Minimal Works

Each year in the eastern country a substantial number of teachers leave the profession after only a short period of time working in the schools. The problem in the Philippines public school is that teacher attrition continues despite the implementation of programs to address possible reasons for leaving. One of the factor is so much work loads for teachers to do. Teachers are more productive if they have less teaching loads and students (Pendleton - Brown, 2019).

Philippines has tons of paper works that are most of the time repeated. But in the US, the only paper work i get to prepare are the students worksheets. Even the report cards are done by the office and they did all the printing as well. (14)
Less paper works, having a preparation time, less number of students (13)

Theme 5: Well Compensated

Teachers compensation is designed to address the dual challenges of encouraging high teacher performance and drawing in and keeping good instructors in situations where their performance is difficult to assess or observe. Earnings in the teaching field are more heavily influenced by input than by output (Lavy, 2007). The USVI Department of Paying system is improved by switching to an earnings structure that links pay to some performance indicators.

That's why we also get to travel to other states and work part time jobs and earn more money and save. And literally enjoy life. We are not super exhausted with school work here. (15)
My salary in the USVI is way better than my salary in the Philippines. (12)

Teachers must have enough pay adjacent to their workloads for them to be more productive in their respective fields. According to Pendleton - Brown (2011) that teacher's compensation was significant in affecting the teacher to stay. Thus, well compensate teachers with minimal work load leads to low attrition rates.

5. Discussion

Based on the themes emerged, the lived experiences of the Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands revolved around the challenges they faced when new teaching environment in abroad. Their experience strikes particularly on how they struggle in handling the behavior of the students, new teaching environment at the same time being away from their loved ones. On the other hand, the teachers' experience in terms of administrative support, well compensation and less work load and students help them to adjust in their new teaching environment. Never the less Filipinos are known to be more resilient. Thus, teachers have their coping mechanism such as adapting to new working environment and having a sound mindset. This helps them overcome the challenges they have encountered during their teaching career in the Islands.

Looking at the commonalities among the teachers' experiences, it can be said that teaching abroad was not only about the having a good compensation or good life abroad, but also about the psychological stability of anyone who chose to try the life of an overseas worker. Not everyone who flew prepared, though, was successful in their pursuit of better chances. Some of them also had setbacks and shortcomings. It was unable to take into account the fact that factors contributing to depression included a teacher's capacity to cope with difficult situations with the support of their supervisors, peers, friends, and family teachers are able to continue and enjoy their program as an international educator.

Propositions

The following propositions were formulated out from the themes generated and linked.

Proposition 1: Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands are struggling in adapting the new working environment and the student's behavior.

Proposition 2: Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands coping mechanisms are to adapt and to have a sound mindset in the new ecological set - up.

Proposition 3: Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands have minimal work load and students, and well compensated that motivates them to continue the international program for teachers.

Propositions 4: Close administrative supervision of the Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands is highly evident. Stressing out the professional and personal development of teachers.

Theory Development

New - Ecological Acclimatization Theory

The theory is postulated by the researcher as the study progressed that is generated from the lived experiences of the Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands. The "New - Ecological" was derived from the new working environment of the Filipino teachers and the "Acclimatization" is how the teachers adapt to the challenges and coping mechanism of the teachers they encountered in teaching abroad. As an outcome, it develops the New - Ecological Acclimatization Theory.

In addition, teachers have intercultural experience has difficulty in adapting their new working environment. But, also notes that teachers' identities are shaped by diverse practices. Thus, Filipino teachers in US Virgin Islands experienced a great change in new - ecological set up at the same time struggling in managing students' behavior.

The New - Ecological Acclimatization Theory is started from the Natural Section. As mentioned Simonet (2022) states that he notion of evolution, which has long been glossed over in discussions about how instructors can survive in modern educational environments, serves as the intellectual foundation for adaptability. And with the substantial change in the number of Filipino teachers in the Philippines as of the study's current date, teachers who work abroad have emerged as one of the main adaptation - related topics.

Linking to the propositions, the Filipino teachers in the US Virgin Islands learned how to acclimate despite of the challenges they experienced working outside the country such as struggling in managing student behavior and being away from their families. Teachers still find a way to cope with this challenges. They manage to adjust with their students, co - teachers and administrator and having a good mindset for them to enjoy the program. The constant support of the admins motivates and let them feel that their presence is a great help in forming the wholistic development of the students in US Virgin Islands.

In conclusion, New - Ecological Acclimatization Theory wires the Filipino teacher in the Us Virgin Islands on how to adapt to their new working space and be resilient in all the challenges they encountered during their teaching career outside the country. Moreover, compensation and the moral support from the administrators would greatly motivates the teachers to instinctively find ways to survive in their New - Ecological Climate.

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