

MOVING ABROAD: THE PLIGHT OF MIGRANT TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study was to explore the experiences, difficulties, causes, consequences, coping mechanisms, and insights of teachers who previously taught in the New Bataan District and are now working as primary and junior high school teachers in other countries. A phenomenological qualitative design was employed and purposive sampling was utilized in selecting the eight participants who previously taught in the New Bataan District and are now working as primary and junior high school teachers in other countries. The findings of the study revealed that the experiences encountered by the participants were coming to school early to prepare learning plan, coming to school early before the start of classes, flexible teaching time, ride on a bicycle in going to school, and going to school early on a scooter. Their motivations were high salary, financial security, personal growth opportunities, international exposure, and favorable working conditions abroad. The factors that influenced teachers were offered salary, opportunities for professional growth, quality of the workplace, the attractiveness of the living environment, and shared experiences from friends. The difficulties faced were imposing discipline, preparing students for standardized tests like the ACT, teaching English as a second language, managing the care of very young children, and overcoming classroom management issues coupled with language barriers. The coping mechanisms migrant teachers used were keep in touch with family, hangout and attend parties, and hangout with friends. The insights were learner-centered environment a better approach, need to separate personal feelings from profession, providing teaching and learning needs enhances better outcome, study students' culture and needs, working on learning materials a better choice, research the culture of students, and learning materials need not to be pompous.

Keyword: *migrant teachers, experiences, motivations, influence, difficulties, coping mechanisms, insights, phenomenological study*

1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher migration is a significant concern in many countries, including the Philippines. The dynamics of global education migration have been steadily evolving, with an increasing number of educators seeking teaching opportunities beyond their native shores. This phenomenon affects both the countries of origin and destination. In the Philippines, it leads to a shortage of qualified educators, increased workloads for remaining teachers, financial losses from investments in training, and disruption in the transfer of cultural values. In destination countries, migrant teachers face integration challenges, such as adapting to new curricula and teaching methods, and cultural barriers, including language differences and misunderstandings, which hinder effective communication and teaching.

In the Philippines, the persistent issue of teacher shortages was particularly highlighted during the initial stages of the K-to-12 program. The Department of Education (DepEd) identified an urgent need for 60,000 to 82,000 teachers nationwide [1], a demand that coincided with a consistent increase in the number of Filipino teachers migrating abroad [2]. For instance, a study revealed that Filipino teachers have migrated to a Native American Reservation School in the USA, seeking personal growth, economic improvement, and cultural exchange while leaving behind financial struggles and bureaucratic frustrations in the Philippines [3]. This trend underscores the complex dynamics of global teacher migration and its impact on the educational landscape in the Philippines.

Teachers from the New Bataan District who have moved abroad to teach are influenced by various factors in their decision to leave. These factors include workload, perceived success, and salary. Additionally, personal factors such as stress, pressure, and the desire to be closer to family and friends living abroad play significant roles. This situation negatively affects the evolving landscape of education in several ways, including teacher shortages, loss of experienced educators, reduced morale, and continuity issues. This study aimed to explore the motivations and challenges faced by these migrant teachers, shedding light on the broader implications of their migration on both their home and host educational systems.

Despite the growing body of literature on the migration of teachers and its impact on educational systems, there remained a significant gap in understanding the specific experiences and challenges faced by teachers from the New Bataan District who had moved abroad. Existing studies often generalized the motivations and consequences of teacher migration without delving into the nuanced personal narratives and contextual factors that shaped these experiences. Furthermore, there was a lack of in-depth qualitative research that explored how the migration of these teachers affected not only their professional lives but also the educational landscapes in both their home and host countries. This study sought to address this gap by providing a comprehensive phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of these migrant teachers, thereby offering valuable insights into the complex dynamics of teacher migration and its broader implications for educational systems.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore the experiences, challenges, motivations, and consequences of eight teachers who had previously taught in the New Bataan District and were then working as primary and junior high school teachers in other countries. By delving into their personal narratives, this research sought to provide insights into the multifaceted aspects of their migration journey, shedding light on the broader implications for both the educators and the educational systems in their home and host countries.

1.2 Review of Related Literature

High rates of teacher attrition constitute a worldwide issue of concern. The movement of professionals from one nation to another has substantially increased in the contemporary world. A multitude of social, economic, and political factors have contributed to this migration, including the fact that the number of professionals working abroad continues to rise. Numerous educators and students in the field of education are actively seeking opportunities to travel internationally in order to accomplish personal academic objectives, develop intercultural awareness, and attain a sense of autonomy. Furthermore, educators are increasingly expected to cultivate cultural sensitivity and expand their professional and personal horizons [4].

According to the study of Bright [5], the motivations behind teachers pursuing international teaching positions are multifaceted and go beyond simple categorizations. Factors such as travel, experiencing change and adventure, and employment prospects were prominent in teachers' narratives, whereas a solid dedication to international education was not necessarily prevalent. The study also observed that some teachers stumbled into international teaching unexpectedly; seizing unforeseen opportunities, while others made deliberate, strategic decisions driven by career advancement goals.

For Filipino educators aspiring for better opportunities, seeking employment abroad is a promising avenue to secure work, provide for their families, and explore new locales. It is also perceived as a test, particularly for recent graduates, to demonstrate their value internationally and contribute their expertise to students and the educational community abroad. Given the evident cultural differences between their homeland and foreign countries, adapting and integrating with students, colleagues, and the local community pose significant challenges for graduates of Teacher Education programs. Nevertheless, they are driven to excel professionally in unfamiliar territories [6].

Taking on international teaching roles comes with its own set of challenges despite the positive impact. The opportunity to teach and reside abroad entails inherent risks and challenges. Situational factors include housing, financial concerns, emotional strain, isolation, and melancholy, in addition to deficiencies in communication abilities and university or college support [4].

The teaching profession is witnessing significant transformations, with an increasing number of educators accepting positions in schools abroad at unprecedented levels. Teachers who venture into unfamiliar cultural settings are tasked with adapting to not only a new workplace but also a new host culture. Despite the correlation between poor adaptation, decreased job performance, and elevated turnover rates, overseas teachers' experiences remain largely uncharted [7]. However, the fact that instructors abroad faced daily emotional battles, such as homesickness for their loved ones, was only known to a select few [8]. Many educators find teaching abroad challenging, especially those with families and children [9].

The research conducted by Reyes et al. [10] proposed a set of coping mechanisms, namely sociability, personality, and adaptability that Filipino educators should employ to navigate the challenges encountered in the professional realm effectively. These challenges encompass difficulties with students and interactions with colleagues and parents of children from diverse national backgrounds. Filipino educators are consistently confronted with possibilities and challenges that necessitate their resolution.

1.3 Theoretical Lens

The framework of this study was based on the Push-Pull Theory of Migration by Everett S. Lee (1966). According to this theory, migration was influenced by a combination of "push" factors, which were conditions or circumstances in the migrants' home country that encouraged them to leave, and "pull" factors, which were the attractions or opportunities in the destination country that drew migrants towards it.

The conceptual framework in this study shows the different elements revolving around the condition of those teachers who are teaching in other countries and those who are planning to migrate. The framework of this study presents the interconnectedness of each of the elements. It is a clear indication that exploring the experiences, motivations, influence, difficulties, coping mechanisms and insights of teachers who migrated would shed lights why many teachers are going out from the country and why they do not stay there for good.

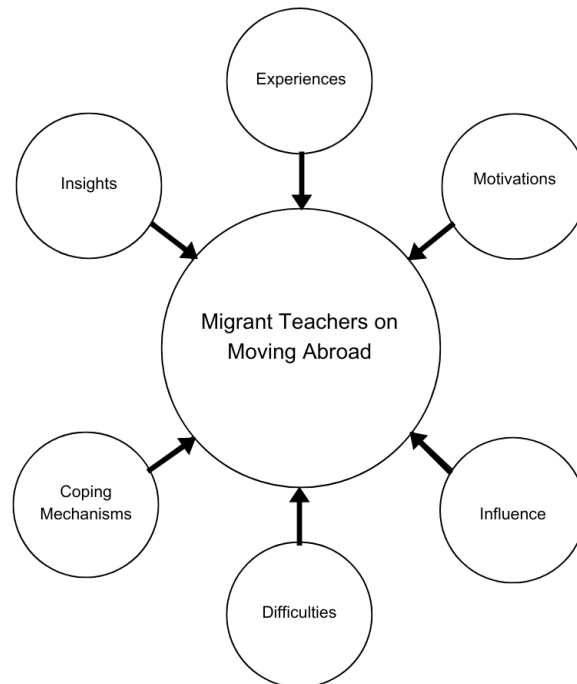


Fig -1: Conceptual Framework

1.4 Research Questions

The primary goal of this study was to explore the motivations and challenges of teachers who are teaching abroad. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of the participants who are teaching in other countries?
2. What are the motivations of teachers to pursue opportunities abroad in their careers?
3. What influence migrant teachers of their choice of location?
4. What are the difficulties faced by the participants in teaching abroad?
5. What coping mechanisms do migrant teachers use to navigate the challenges they encounter?
6. What insights do migrant teachers gain from their experiences abroad?

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized the qualitative phenomenological research design. Phenomenology as a research design is concerned to explore the experiences, difficulties, causes, consequences, coping mechanisms, and insights of teachers who migrated to other countries. Phenomenological study delves into the essence of phenomena, proves particularly suitable for elucidating the reasons behind observed occurrences, evaluating intricate interventions with multiple components, and refining intervention strategies. Phenomenology, as a qualitative method, serves as a theoretical tool in educational research. It enables researchers to undertake adaptable activities that can elucidate and comprehend intricate phenomena, including different facets of human social experience [11]. Qualitative research, characterized as the exploration of the fundamental nature of phenomena, encompasses their characteristics, diverse expressions, contextual underpinnings, and varying perspectives while excluding considerations of their extent, frequency, and position within an objectively established causal sequence [12].

2.2 Data Analysis

After data collection, the information gathered from the in-depth interviews was compiled, recorded, and examined. Initially, the data was organized and prepared for analysis, involving the transcription of interviews, compilation of field notes, and sorting and organizing information into various categories based on data sources. Subsequently, the data was meticulously reviewed.

In this study, the researcher derived a general understanding from the information and reflected on the overall meaning of the responses. Following this, the researcher conducted an analysis guided by a specific theoretical framework, entailing the coding or organization of related data segments into distinct categories.

Following the coding process, thematic analysis ensued. The researcher closely scrutinized the data to identify recurring themes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning evident in the interview scripts and verbatim responses of the participants, who comprised teachers. Themes were identified based on their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and suggestions.

Subsequent to the thematic analysis, major themes were formulated. In this study, the researcher derived major themes from the verbatim responses and interview scripts. These major themes were extracted, elucidated, and documented under each respective topic, supported by relevant citations to substantiate their significance.

3. FINDINGS

The responses were subjected to content analysis to extract common themes across all participants' answers. In accordance with ethical standards for qualitative research, codes were employed to conceal the identities of the participants. The presentation of the results followed the order of the specific research questions utilized in this study.

3.1 What are the experiences of the participants who are teaching in other countries?

This section presents the results to the 1st major research question; 'What are the experiences of the participants who are teaching in other countries?' Four specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather information on their experiences teaching in other countries.

Specific Research Question 1.1

The themes in this section were coming from the specific research question 1.1 “How would you describe a typical day in your teaching experience abroad?” The responses generated five themes: coming to school early to prepare learning plan, coming to school early before the start of classes, flexible teaching time, ride on a bicycle in going to school, and going to school early on a scooter.

Specific Research Question 1.2

This section presents the results to the specific research question 1.2 ‘In what ways do you perceive the cultural differences impacting your teaching style and interactions with students?’ under the 1st major research question ‘What are the experiences of the participants who are teaching in other countries?’ The following themes serves as results, which were: making adjustments to learners’ attitude and culture, prepare activities suitable to students, teachers to reach out to students, teachers to go down to the level of students, and no pressure imposed on students.

Specific Research Question 1.3

The themes in this section were coming from the specific research question 1.3 ‘what are the memorable experiences you have encountered while teaching abroad?’ The responses generated nine themes: being corrected with pronunciation, being asked to sing on the stage, being asked to leave for cleaning students’ anus, being frightened by a student with a snake, getting distracted by a student from another class, being admired by a student, being called stupid by a student, scary encounter with a rattle snake, and poor performance of students in assessments.

Specific Research Question 1.4

The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research question 1.4 ‘what are the memorable successes experienced while teaching abroad?’ are presented in this section. There themes were: being appreciated by the school principal, students presenting successful outputs, technological support from school and government, being elated with students’ presentation, fulfilment felt with students returning to regular school, and apply strategies used in the Philippines.

3.2 What are the motivations of teachers to pursue opportunities abroad in their careers?

This section presents the results to the 2nd major research question ‘What are the motivations of teachers to pursue opportunities abroad in their careers?’ Two specific research questions were used to collect data for this question highlighting the factors that led to the participants’ decision to teach abroad and the weight of the potential benefits or risks of teaching abroad before making the decision.

Specific Research Question 2.1

The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research question 2.1 ‘What motivations led to your decision to teach abroad? are presented in this section. The themes were: high salary and for financial security, for personal growth, international exposure, nice place, good working environment, and effective administration and educational system, and low salary, working loads, and unhealthy work environment in DepEd.

Specific Research Question 2.2

This section presents the results to the specific question 2.2 ‘How did you weigh the potential benefits or risks of teaching abroad before making the decision?’ After subjecting the responses to content analysis, the following themes were drawn: long-time dream, due to financial problem, started as tourist visa holder, influenced and supported by relatives, and weighed on the pros and cons.

3.3 What influence migrant teachers of their choice of location?

This section presents the results on the viewpoints of the research participants regarding the factors influencing migrant teachers' choice of location. The decision of migrant teachers regarding their teaching destination is influenced by several key factors, collectively shaping their decision-making process. Two specific research questions were utilized to gather data and information.

Specific Research Question 3.1

In this section, the themes created were from the responses to specific research question 3.1, 'What factors influenced your choice of destination for teaching abroad?' The following were the themes: offered salary, professional growth, workplace, nice to live with, and shared experience by friends.

Specific Research Question 3.2

Presented in this section are the themes drawn from the responses to the specific research question 3.2, 'What specific features or characteristics of the destination country attracted you as a teacher?' The following themes were created: salary, workloads and less stress, peaceful, safe place, cost of living is not high, lots of place to visit, and students' behavior.

3.4 What are the difficulties faced by the participants in teaching abroad?

The results in this section were from the responses to the specific research questions used to gather data for the 4th major research question, 'What are the difficulties faced by the participants in teaching abroad?' Two specific research questions were utilized to collect data and pieces of information.

Specific Research Question 4.1

The themes created in this section were from the responses to the specific research question 4.1, 'What are the main difficulties you have encountered in adapting to the educational system of the host country?' The themes were imposing discipline, preparation for ACT test, teaching English, taking care of children aged 0 to 5 years old, and classroom management and language barrier.

Specific Research Question 4.2

The themes in this section were drawn from specific research question 4.2, 'What hurdles have you faced regarding language barriers or communication with students, colleagues, or administrators?' under the 4th major research question 'What are the difficulties faced by the participants in teaching abroad?' The themes drawn were no much hurdles and language barrier.

3.5 What coping mechanisms do migrant teachers use to navigate the challenges they encounter?

This section presents the results to the 5th major research question, 'What coping mechanisms do migrant teachers use to navigate the challenges they encounter?' Four specific research questions were utilized to gather data that would answer the question.

Specific Research Question 5.1

The results in this section were taken from the responses to the specific research question 5.1, 'What strategies have you found most effective in overcoming cultural or linguistic barriers in your teaching environment?' under the 5th major research question, 'What coping mechanisms do migrant teachers use to navigate the challenges they encounter?' The following were the themes drawn from the responses; study their culture, behavior and language, open lines of communication with students, integrate culture during discussions, use of printed materials, and go with their traditions.

Specific Research Question 5.2

This section presents the results to the specific research question 5.2 'How do you seek support or guidance when facing challenges while teaching abroad?' After subjecting the responses to content analysis, the following themes were drawn: seek help from co-workers, and ask help from friends and our countrymen.

Specific Research Question 5.3

Presented in this section are the themes drawn from the responses to the specific research question 5.3, 'How have you coped with the potential feelings of isolation or homesickness while teaching in a foreign country?' The following themes were created: keep in touch with family, hangout and attend parties and hangout with friends.

Specific Research Question 5.4

The themes in this section were drawn from specific research question 5.4, 'what are examples of collaboration or teamwork you have had with local educators to address common challenges?' under the 5th major research question 'What coping mechanisms do migrant teachers use to navigate the challenges they encounter?' The themes drawn

were share challenges and strategies during department meeting, work with colleagues through training groups, do it on staff day, and meeting of foreign teachers with principal.

3.6 What insights do migrant teacher gain from their experiences abroad?

This section presents the results to the 6th major research question; ‘What insights do migrant teacher gain from their experiences abroad?’ Four specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather information on the insights of migrant teachers gained from their experiences abroad.

Specific Research Question 6.1

The themes in this section were coming from the specific research question 6.1 ‘How have your experiences teaching abroad influenced your understanding of diverse teaching methodologies or pedagogical approaches?’ The responses generated seven themes: learner-centered environment a better approach, need to separate personal feelings from profession, providing teaching and learning needs enhances better outcome, study students’ culture and needs, working on learning materials a better choice, research the culture of students, and learning materials need not to be pompous.

Specific Research Question 6.2

This section presents the results to the specific research question 6.2 ‘How have your cross-cultural experiences led to adaptations or innovations in your teaching methods? Under the 6th major research question ‘What insights do migrant teacher gain from their experiences abroad?’ The following themes serves as results, which were: need to adapt to culture of people, learning the importance of discipline and respect, need to balance traditional and modern approaches, and integrate cultural practices in class.

Specific Research Question 6.3

In this section, the themes created were from the responses to specific research question 6.3 ‘In what ways do you integrate the lessons learned from teaching abroad into your professional development or mentorship of other educators?’ The following were the themes: sharing of teaching strategies, recognize the individuality of students, focus on understanding culture of people, sharing of different cultures, and learn by observing colleagues.

Specific Research Question 6.4

Presented in this section are the themes drawn from the responses to the specific question 6.4, ‘What are your learnings or reflections from your experience as a migrant teacher?’ The following themes were created: need to adapt to other culture, need to be adaptable, living abroad offers a better quality of life, American educational system a better one, equality among people regardless of position, and loving one’s job lead to happiness and satisfaction.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study provides a detailed exploration of the varied experiences of teachers working in foreign countries. The study reveals that these educators face both rewarding opportunities and significant challenges as they adapt to new educational systems and cultural contexts. Their experiences often involve substantial adjustments, but they also highlight the enriching aspects of international exposure.

The primary motivations for teachers pursuing opportunities abroad include the potential for higher salaries, better financial security, personal growth, and the chance to gain international experience. These factors drive educators to seek out opportunities in different countries, aiming to improve their professional and personal lives.

When choosing their destination, teachers are influenced by factors such as competitive salary offers, prospects for professional advancement, and the quality of life in the new location. Recommendations from peers and relatives also play a crucial role in shaping their decisions.

However, teaching abroad comes with its own set of difficulties. Teachers encounter challenges such as adapting to unfamiliar educational systems, managing classroom dynamics, and overcoming language barriers. These obstacles require significant adjustments and can impact job satisfaction and effectiveness.

To cope with these challenges, migrant teachers utilize various strategies including seeking support from colleagues and friends, adjusting to local cultural norms, and engaging in professional development. These approaches help them navigate the demands of their new roles and maintain their overall well-being.

From their international experiences, teachers gain valuable insights into the importance of cultural adaptability, the benefits of a higher quality of life, and the effectiveness of different educational systems. These reflections highlight the need for continued professional development and cultural competence to enhance teaching practices. Overall, the study provides practical implications for improving support systems for migrant teachers and refining professional development programs, thereby contributing to a more effective and rewarding teaching experience.

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