

Filipino Teachers' Teaching Experiences in Select Southeast Asian Countries: A Meta-Synthesis

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Filipino teachers, teaching abroad, southeast asia, teacher migration, meta-synthesis

Abstract. This study aimed to synthesize the teaching experiences of Filipino teachers in selected Southeast Asian countries, focusing on their motivations, challenges, adaptation, and professional development. A qualitative meta-synthesis design was employed using studies published from 2016 to 2026 and retrieved from Google Scholar, Crossref, OpenAlex, and Scopus through Harzing's Publish or Perish. The studies were screened using the PRISMA 2020 framework, assessed using the CASP qualitative checklist, and analyzed through thematic analysis. Twenty-three qualitative studies were included in the synthesis. Five themes emerged: (1) migration motivations and professional trajectory, (2) cultural and instructional adaptation, (3) challenges and constraints in teaching, (4) emotional and psychological experiences, and (5) coping strategies and professional resilience. These themes converged into the meta-theme of teachers' transnational professional lived experiences. The findings show that teaching abroad provides opportunities for professional and personal growth while requiring teachers to navigate cultural, linguistic, institutional, and emotional challenges. The study highlights the importance of professional development, cultural orientation, social support, and well-being support for Filipino teachers working in international educational contexts.

Introduction

Teacher migration has become an increasingly noticeable pattern in the global education sector as educators seek professional opportunities beyond their home countries. Filipino teachers, in particular, have been recognized for their competence, adaptability, and strong work ethic, which have enabled them to secure teaching positions in different countries around Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. A number of studies have documented these experiences of Filipino teachers working outside their home country and have highlighted both the opportunities and challenges linked with international teaching careers (Real & Flordeliz, 2024; Sumalinog, 2021). Research highlights that many Filipino educators pursue teaching positions overseas for economic motivations, better working conditions, and opportunities for career advancement (Tantay et al., 2024). However, teaching abroad also demands teachers to get through cultural differences, institutional expectations, and professional adaptation in unfamiliar educational environment.

With the increasing globalization of education, the movement of teachers has become a subject of expanding scholarly interest. Studies have stated that teaching abroad provides Filipino educators with opportunities for both personal and professional growth, such as exposure to various pedagogical approaches, access to better educational materials, and enhanced career possibilities (Laxamana, 2026). For instance, Filipino teachers working in international contexts likely develop stronger intercultural competence and pedagogical flexibility as they interact with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Similarly, ethnographic research examining Filipino teachers in Thailand revealed that the process of cultural adaptation and community support significantly shaped their professional identity and sense of belonging in foreign educational systems (Perales et al., 2025). These experiences illustrate how international teaching assignments can broaden educators' perspectives and enhance their professional development.

Despite these opportunities, several studies also emphasize that teaching abroad presents significant challenges for Filipino educators. One of the most commonly reported difficulties involves adjusting to new cultural and institutional environments, which may include differences in teaching practices, classroom management styles, and educational policies (Macapagong et al., 2023). Teachers working abroad may also encounter language barriers, professional expectations, and cultural norms that differ significantly from those in the Philippines. Furthermore, some Filipino teachers experience homesickness, social isolation, and difficulties adapting to unfamiliar communities while working overseas (Real & Flordeliz, 2024). These challenges require teachers to develop coping strategies and resilience in order to successfully navigate their professional and personal lives in foreign contexts.

Research also highlights that the motivations for Filipino teachers to work abroad are often influenced by a combination of economic, professional, and personal factors. Economic incentives, including higher salaries and enhanced benefits, remains a primary motivating factor for many educators seeking employment overseas (Tantay et al., 2024). In the same manner, some teachers pursue international teaching opportunities to acquire global experience, improve their professional competencies, and widen their career pathways (Laxamana, 2026). Studies studying Filipino migrant English teachers further suggest that migration decisions are influenced by both push factors, such as limited local opportunities, and pull factors, including higher compensation and professional recognition abroad (Lin & Tsai, 2025). These motivations reflect the broader dynamics of teacher migration in the context of worldwide labor mobility.

Although a number of studies have studied the lived experiences of Filipino teachers working outside the Philippines, most of these investigations only focused on specific countries, small samples, or individual contexts. For example, previous research has explored the experiences of Filipino teachers in Thailand, the United States, and the Middle East using qualitative phenomenological approaches (Deguma & Deguma, 2022; Macapagong et al., 2023; Umangay, 2025). While these studies provide worthy insights into the experiences of teachers in particular locations, there remains limited effort to synthesize these findings into a broader understanding of Filipino teachers' experiences across multiple countries or international contexts. In addition, few studies have conducted a qualitative systematic review or meta-synthesis that integrates existing research to identify common themes, challenges, and opportunities experienced by Filipino teachers working abroad.

With this, this study aims to meta-synthesize existing research on Filipino teachers' experiences in teaching abroad. By looking into and integrating findings from existing qualitative studies, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the motivations, challenges, coping strategies, and professional development encounters of Filipino teachers working in international educational environments.

Research Questions

Particularly, this study aims to answer the following questions: (1) What challenges do Filipino teachers encounter while teaching in foreign educational environments?, (2) How do Filipino teachers adapt to cultural and professional differences in their host countries?, (3) What opportunities for professional and personal development emerge from their experiences abroad? And, (4) What implications and recommendations can be drawn from the synthesized findings?

Methodology

Participants

Meta-synthesis research design is conducted through data mining, which gathers existing studies to make a systematic review (Jifa, 2013). This study synthesizes the experiences of Filipino teachers who are the participants in the published studies on teaching abroad, particularly in select Southeast Asian countries. These teachers were employed in various educational institutions, including public schools, private schools, and international schools. Their experiences, gathered through interviews and narratives in the studies included, served as the basis for identifying common patterns, challenges, and professional development opportunities.

Research Design

This study utilized a meta-synthesis research approach to interpret and synthesize findings from related qualitative studies on Filipino teachers' experiences in teaching abroad (Walsh & Downe, 2005). Meta-synthesis includes systematically reviewing and integrating qualitative research to create a broader understanding of a phenomenon (Lachal et al., 2017). Using this approach, previously published research recording the lived experiences of Filipino educators in foreign teaching contexts was analyzed and synthesized.

Study Search Procedure

Relevant studies were retrieved from Google Scholar, Crossref, OpenAlex, and Scopus, through the Harzing's Publish or Perish software (Harzing, 2007). The search focused on studies published between 2016 and 2026.

The following keywords were used: (a) Filipino teachers abroad, (b) overseas Filipino teachers, (c) Filipino educators teaching in Southeast Asia, (d) experiences of Filipino teachers abroad, and (e) teacher motivation and opportunities in teaching abroad. These descriptors were coded individually and combined in the software to locate relevant studies. Duplicate and irrelevant articles were deleted, and the final selection was organized using a PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2021).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria allow systematic basis for selecting studies for synthesis (Meline, 2006). Studies included in this study met the following criteria: (a) published between 2016 and 2026; (b) written in English; (c) focused on Filipino teachers teaching abroad particularly in Southeast Asia; (d) employed qualitative research designs exploring teachers' experiences; and (e) implemented in any of the South-East Asian countries.

Studies were removed if they focused on non-teaching overseas workers, used purely quantitative methods, did not directly examine Filipino teachers' experiences, or did not take place in any of the South-East Asian countries.

Instrument

In qualitative research, the researchers serve as the primary instrument in gathering and analyzing data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this meta-synthesis, the experiences of Filipino teachers teaching in Southeast Asian countries were synthesized from selected research articles. Harzing's Publish or Perish software was used to recover and organize the publications from Google Scholar, Crossref, OpenAlex and Scopus. A Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) qualitative checklist was used to evaluate the methodological quality, strengths, and limitations of each selected study (CASP, 2022).

Data Analysis

Meta-synthesis is a qualitative research design. With this, no statistical analysis was employed. Instead, thematic analysis was used to determine patterns and emerging themes from the selected studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis employed the six steps: familiarization with the data, creation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and interpreting findings. This process enabled the identification of shared experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and professional growth of Filipino teachers teaching in Southeast Asia.

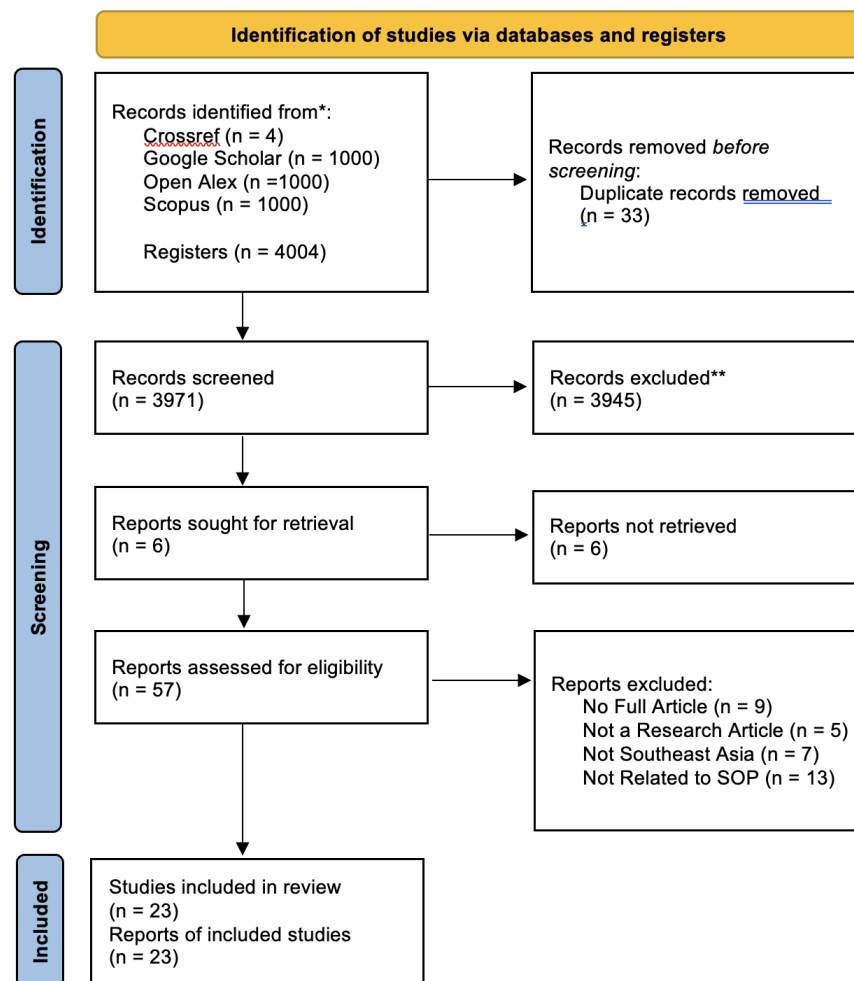


Figure No. 1. Prisma flow diagram on data selection

Results and Discussion

The data gathered on the teachers' experiences from Harzing's Publish or Perish was sorted using the PRISMA flow 2020 diagram, as shown in Figure 1. The descriptive data of the included articles are detailed in Table 1. The initially collected studies from Harzing's Publish or Perish Software were evaluated to remove studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Records identified from Crossref (n = 4), Google Scholar (n = 1000), OpenAlex (n = 1000), and Scopus (n = 1000) summed up to 4,004 records. After duplicate removal (n = 33), 3,971 records were scrutinized, of which 3,945 were removed. Six (6) reports were retrieved, all of which were still not included in the final count. A total of 57 reports were assessed for eligibility, with exclusions due to unavailability of full article (n = 9), not being research articles (n = 5), conducted outside Southeast Asia (n = 7), and not relevant with the statement of the problem (n = 13). Ultimately, twenty-three (23) studies were included in the final review.

All twenty-three (23) included studies focused on teachers' experiences within Southeast Asia and some studies which mentioned these countries. These studies studied the teachers' lived experiences, motivations, challenges, coping strategies, identity formation, and professional adaptation across international and multicultural educational environments. These experiences were analyzed through a six-step thematic analysis, which created the five (5) themes, namely: (1) migration motivations and professional trajectory, (2) cultural and instructional adaptation, (3) challenges and constraints in teaching, (4) emotional and psychological experiences, and (5) coping strategies and professional resilience. Clustering all themes has emerged one meta-theme, teachers' transnational professional lived experiences. The said themes and meta-theme are described below.

Number	Author	Year	Setting	Teachers' Experiences
1	Uytico & Abadiano	2020	Abroad (including some Southeast Asian countries)	Pursuit of personal and professional goals Immersion in foreign culture Experience of culture shock Development of positive attitude for survival
2	Flores	2021	Abroad (including some Southeast Asian countries)	Reconstruction of language identity Questioning of "nativeness" in English Influence of interaction with global English speakers Continuous reshaping of self as language user
3	Cahilog et al.	2023	Abroad (including some Southeast Asian countries)	Migration driven by financial stability Emotional attachment to students in home country Need for improved compensation and benefits Demand for professional development and support
4	Sumalinog	2022	Abroad (including some Southeast Asian countries)	Extreme homesickness Language barriers with students Experience of burnout and depression Psychological strain in overseas teaching
5	Ancho et al.	2023	Abroad (including some Southeast Asian countries)	Importance of pre-service training Need for continuous professional development Requirement for adaptability Managing stress in teaching abroad
6	Waterworth	2016	Southeast Asia	Acting as cultural and linguistic representative Managing intercultural teaching expectations Experiencing role conflict in language teaching Need for pedagogical and intercultural support
7	Quitolbo	2024	Southeast Asia	Difficulty in virtual classroom management Challenges in differentiated instruction Maintaining instructional quality during pandemic Promoting inclusive classroom environment
8	Sayed & Sarangapani	2021	Southeast Asia	Navigating complex teaching conditions Influence of colonial/postcolonial discourse Shaping of teacher identity and professionalism Need for sustained professional development

9	Ramirez	2022	Southeast Asia	Lack of digital pedagogical competence Poor internet connectivity issues Difficulty in online classroom management Increased responsibility and initiative
10	Masa & Estrellas	2025	Southeast Asia	Limited access to teaching resources Lack of institutional/embassy support Perceived "unqualified" teaching status
11	Perales et al.	2025b	Thailand	Development of coping strategies Adjustment to new pedagogy and system Adaptation to cultural norms Reliance on Filipino peer support Strengthening shared identity and belonging
12	Deguma	2022	Thailand	Viewing teaching abroad as opportunity Coping with workplace conflicts Gaining professional recognition Strengthening self-confidence and values
13	Balintag & Saengsri	2022	Thailand	Administrative-related demotivation Student-related behavioral challenges Self-related demotivation factors
14	Ulla	2018	Thailand	Use of coping strategies Students' lack of interest in English Limited English-speaking environment Unclear English curriculum
15	Cabiladas & Soontornwipast	2020	Thailand	Lack of professional development Large class size challenges Inconsistent student assessment Salary-related concerns Issues with teaching materials and pedagogy
16	Nañez & Viray	2023	Thailand	Language barriers in communication Experiences of racial prejudice Cultural misunderstandings Use of adaptive communication strategies
17	Balgoa	2019	Japan	Struggle with nonnative speaker identity Pressure to sound like native speakers Encounter with discrimination
18	Bisenio	2024	Japan	Identity reconfiguration Serving as cultural ambassador Recognition in teaching performance Challenges as nonnative English speaker

19	San Jose & Refareal	2025	Japan	Development of resilience and adaptability Bridging cultural and linguistic gaps Identity negotiation
20	Casingal & Caerlang	2025	Japan	Professional transformation Formation of hybrid professional identity Language barriers in teaching Integration of Philippine pedagogies
21	Alicamen & Becamon	2022	Singapore	Adaptation to foreign systems Teaching abroad as life turning point Encountering workplace realities Maintaining optimistic outlook
22	Pozon	2024	Vietnam	Personal and professional growth Cultural integration challenges Adjustment of teaching strategies Curriculum differences
23	Gabe	2025	Vietnam	Development of professional identity Instructional adaptation in international schools Cross-cultural negotiation Demonstration of professional resilience Ongoing identity formation

Table No. 1. Descriptive data of the 15 included studies on teachers' teaching experiences in select Southeast Asian countries

Theme 1. Migration Motivations and Professional Trajectory

Teachers' decisions to work outside the Philippines were primarily driven by financial, professional, and personal growth motivations. Across studies, migration was described as both an economic strategy and a professional advancement, where educators sought better opportunities outside the Philippines and within ASEAN countries (Cahilog et al., 2023; Alicamen & Becamon, 2022; Ancho et al., 2023).

Teachers highlighted financial stability and career advancement as the main reasons for migration, usually balancing these against emotional ties to home and students (Cahilog et al., 2023). In the same way, early childhood educators reported that overseas teaching provided opportunities for professional expansion and identity transformation (Alicamen & Becamon, 2022).

Some studies further emphasize that English language teaching abroad also functions as a migration pathway influenced by language proficiency and global labor demand (Balgoo, 2019; Flores, 2021). In addition, motivations were closely linked to aspirations for personal development and rising social mobility, particularly among Filipino teachers seeking international exposure (Sumalinog, 2022; Ancho et al., 2023).

Theme 2. Cultural and Instructional Adaptation

A leading pattern across studies is the requirement for teachers to adjust pedagogically and culturally to foreign educational settings. Teachers mentioned about adapting instructional strategies, classroom management approaches, and communication styles in response to diverse student populations (Gabe, 2025; Pozon, 2024; Perales et al., 2025b).

In Vietnam and Thailand contexts, Filipino teachers changed and refined teaching approaches to align with institutional expectations and student needs, often combining interactive and learner-centered methods (Gabe, 2025; Cabiladas & Soontornwipast, 2020). Similarly, Assistant Language Teachers in Japan invented hybrid pedagogical identities that combined Filipino teaching practices with host country educational norms (Casingal & Caerlang, 2025).

Cultural adaptation also went beyond pedagogy, involving identity negotiation and intercultural communication. Teachers often assumed dual roles as educators and cultural mediators, especially in multilingual classrooms (Bisenio, 2024; San Jose & Refareal, 2025). In ASEAN environments, teachers also made mention the adjustment to varying academic expectations and institutional cultures (Waterworth, 2016; Ulla, 2018).

Theme 3. Challenges and Constraints in Teaching

In all the 23 studies, teachers consistently experienced multifaceted challenges including linguistic barriers, institutional limitations, workload pressures, and cultural differences.

Language-related challenges were commonly mentioned, particularly in Thailand, Vietnam, and Japan, where communication barriers impacted instruction and classroom engagement (Nañez & Viray, 2023; Sumalinog, 2022; Balgoa, 2019). Institutional challenges such as large class sizes, lacking resources, and unclear curriculum structures were also common (Cabiladas & Soontornwipast, 2020; Ulla, 2018).

Teachers additionally faced professional challenges linked to qualification recognition and employment status, especially among non-education graduates (Masa & Estrellas, 2025; Lin Masa & Estrellas, 2025). During the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges intensified because of digital limitations, intermittent connectivity, and workload expansion (Ramirez, 2022; Quitolbo, 2024).

Emotional strain was also observed, with teachers reporting homesickness, burnout, and psychological fatigue as frequent difficulties (Sumalinog, 2022; Deguma, 2022). These problems collectively reflect structural and emotional pressures experienced in transnational teaching contexts.

Theme 4. Emotional and Psychological Experiences

Teachers' narratives reveal strong emotional aspects shaped by migration, identity negotiation, and workplace encounters. Many expressed homesickness and emotional attachment to family in the Philippines, which affected their adaptation processes abroad (Sumalinog, 2022; Deguma, 2022).

Psychological stressors such as anxiety, burnout, and professional insecurity were also documented, particularly among teachers facing job instability or demanding workloads (Ramirez, 2022; Sumalinog, 2022). In spite of these difficulties, a number of studies highlight emotional fulfillment rooted from professional achievement and student engagement (Perales et al., 2025b; Deguma, 2022).

Identity-related emotional experiences were particularly notable among English language teachers who struggled with perceptions of "nonnativeness" and professional legitimacy (Balgoa, 2019; Flores, 2021). These emotional negotiations demonstrate broader issues of identity construction and professional self-concept in international teaching environments.

Theme 5. Coping Strategies and Professional Resilience

Despite considerable challenges, teachers showed resilience through adaptive coping strategies, professional commitment, and social support systems.

Common coping strategies included collaboration with colleagues, self-regulation strategies, faith-based resilience, and community support (Balintag & Saengsri, 2022; Nañez & Viray, 2023). Filipino teacher communities abroad also served as vital support systems that alleviated homesickness and facilitated adjustment (Perales et al., 2025a).

Professional resilience was also observed in teachers' continuous adaptation to new pedagogical environments and eagerness to innovate instructional practices (Gabe, 2025; Pozon, 2024). During the pandemic, resilience was further displayed through increased responsibility, initiative, and engagement in professional development (Ramirez, 2022; Quitolbo, 2024).

Institutional recommendations across studies consistently highlight the need for professional development programs, mental health support, and enhanced working conditions to maintain teacher resilience (Cahilog et al., 2023; Ancho et al., 2023).

Meta-Theme. Teachers' Lived Experiences in Teaching Abroad

The concept of teaching abroad has acquired expanding scholarly attention as educators engage in cross-border professional mobility within various educational systems (Waterworth, 2016; Flores, 2021). In the included studies, teachers' lived experiences in international contexts are described by a complex interplay of professional opportunity, cultural adjustment, and emotional negotiation. Although teaching abroad provides pathways for career advancement, financial stability, and professional growth, it also exposes educators to structural, linguistic, and sociocultural challenges that shape their everyday teaching realities (Cahilog et al., 2023; Ancho et al., 2023). These experiences are further escalated by the demands of adapting to unfamiliar curricula, varied student populations, and institutional expectations that differ from their home country practices (Gabe, 2025; Cabiladas & Soontornwipast, 2020). At the same time, teachers consistently traversed identity-related tensions, including views of professional legitimacy and linguistic positioning, particularly among English language educators working in non-native contexts (Balgoa, 2019; Flores, 2021). Amidst these challenges, the studies collectively emphasize that teachers demonstrate strong resilience through adaptive coping strategies, professional collaboration, and dependence on social and community support systems that maintain their engagement and commitment to teaching abroad (Balintag & Saengsri, 2022; Nañez & Viray, 2023; Perales et al., 2025b). Overall, teachers' lived experiences in teaching abroad mirror a transformative process of professional and personal recalibration, where migration becomes both an enabling opportunity and a demanding adjustment that transforms pedagogical practice, identity, and emotional well-being across transnational educational landscapes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Teachers working abroad show multifaceted roles molded by migration, cultural adaptation, and professional demands in diverse educational contexts. While teaching abroad provides opportunities for professional growth, financial stability, and personal development, it also brings challenges related to language barriers, cultural differences, institutional limitations, and emotional strain. These experiences pose a demand to teachers to continuously adapt their pedagogical practices, negotiate their professional identities, and respond to the demands of multicultural learning contexts. Against these difficulties, teachers exhibit strong resilience through coping strategies such as collaboration with peers, continuous professional development, and dependence on social and cultural support systems, allowing them to sustain their effectiveness and commitment to teaching. Overall, teaching abroad turns out as a transformative experience that transforms teachers' competencies, perspectives, and well-being. With all of these, it is recommended that educational institutions and policymakers strengthen support systems by providing professional development opportunities, cultural orientation, and mental health support to improve teachers' experiences and effectiveness in international contexts.

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.