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Exploring The Teacher Exchange Program Through the Lens of International Educators

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of international exchange teachers in a Teacher Exchange Program (TEP) and examines the program's impact on their professional development and cultural competence. The study's objectives were to investigate the challenges faced by international exchange teachers, explore the support systems provided by the school and district, and identify strategies to enhance their experience. A qualitative narrative inquiry research design was employed, involving interviews and observations with ten (10) international exchange teachers. The findings revealed that international exchange teachers encountered challenges related to cultural adaptation, language barriers, and classroom management. However, the study also highlighted the positive impact of the TEP on their professional growth and cultural competence. The support systems provided by the school and district, including cultural orientation, mentorship programs, and regular check-ins, were instrumental in facilitating a successful experience for the teachers. The study concludes that fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment, promoting cultural understanding, and offering professional development opportunities are crucial for maximizing the program's benefits.

Keywords: *Education; Narrative Inquiry; Teacher Exchange Program; International Educators.*

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural education is rooted in developing empathy, which reflects a greater understanding of how people experience the world differently and of the unique insights and perspectives they can contribute. Teacher exchanges can bridge the gap between people from different cultures by reducing mistrust that creates barriers to communication and eventually leads to conflict between nations; therefore, teacher exchanges offer hope, mutual understanding, and can help foster tolerance between cultures, although they are not a panacea. In the past, foreign educators have been used to fill temporary teacher vacancies in U.S. public schools during periods of teacher shortages. Data show that Arizona has the 5th highest population (of J-1 visa teachers) and is home to the largest number of people holding J-1 visas of any state within the U.S., with the southernmost border of Mexico frequently being the point of entry for these individuals.

The Teachers' Council is a designated sponsor of the U.S. Department of State J-1 Teacher Exchange Visitor Program, which encourages international educators to participate. Through the J-1 Teacher Program, foreign educators are issued J-1 visas and may teach in accredited primary/secondary schools in the United States for up to three years, with the option

to extend their stay for an additional one or two years. This program enhances intercultural understanding between U.S. citizens and educators from diverse countries; improves educators' pedagogical practices; and provides opportunities for cross-cultural engagement in host school and community activities (Devlin-Foltz & Lunn, 2021; Mantel, Kamm, & Bieri Buschor, 2024).

A central focus of the J-1 Teacher Program is cultural exchange, giving participants the opportunity to share their culture with American communities and learn from their American hosts. When returning to their home school systems after participating in the J-1 Teacher program, these educators are equipped with new and innovative pedagogies and methodologies for the classroom. Although many Filipino teachers experience multiple obstacles when trying to gain access to teaching opportunities in the U.S. (e.g., there will be financial costs associated with the application process, as well as concerns regarding possible exploitation), many Filipino teachers continue to pursue these types of experiences for professional growth and cross-cultural experience (Wu & Gao, 2025).

In light of the ongoing teacher shortage in the Baboquivari Unified School District and the pressing need for innovative recruitment strategies, studying the experiences of international teachers in this district is important. Examining the challenges and opportunities for international educators will inform the development of strategies for successfully integrating international teachers into the school community while maintaining high-quality educational programs. This type of research also contributes to larger discussions around immigration policies, cross-cultural exchanges, and diversity in education. Research on teacher exchanges has found that international teaching experiences support critical reflection, cultural adaptability, and professional development for educators (Acharya, Bhatt, & Acharya, 2024; Brown, 2023; Zhou et al., 2022). Understanding the experiences that international educators encounter will assist policymakers and school administrators in creating inclusive strategies that leverage the strengths of teacher exchange programs and address the local staffing and diversity needs of all students.

Statement of the Problems

The study explored how the Teacher Exchange Program (TEP) influences international educators by examining their motivations, challenges, perceptions of the application and selection processes, and the program's impact on their professional development.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What motivates teachers to participate in the Teacher Exchange Program (TEP)?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter during their participation in the TEP?
3. How effective is the TEP application and selection process from the perspective of international exchange teachers?
4. What is the impact of the TEP on the professional development of participating international exchange teachers?

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Review of Related Studies***International Teacher Exchange Programs and Professional Development***

All over the world, international teacher exchanges (ITEs) are an important part of professional development, intercultural understanding, and teaching innovation for educators. An ITE gives teachers the opportunity to see and learn about another country's education system, as well as its teaching methods and culture, thereby enhancing their ability to teach effectively and think differently. Devlin-Foltz and Lunn (2021) state that government-supported international collaborations enable science teachers to connect with and be part of a global educational community. Through these programs, teachers learn about a variety of instructional practices, share innovative instructional methods, and build stronger collaborative relationships in science education worldwide. In conclusion, the authors found that teachers who participate in ITEs frequently return to their home institutions with renewed enthusiasm and improved strategies for using inquiry-based learning to engage students.

In China, Zhou et al. (2022) conducted a study that examined the effect of an international exchange program on Chinese teachers seeking a teaching credential. The findings showed that Chinese teacher candidates who participated in the exchange had a much better understanding of how to teach in ways that reflect student-centered and reflective practices. Even after the exchange program ended, the knowledge and perspectives the Chinese teaching candidates gained from the international exchange continued to shape their teaching methods, providing evidence that the impact of ITEs can be life-altering and transformative.

Shi and Jain (2023) investigated the outcomes of an international exchange experience by observing a Shanghai teacher who participated in the China-England Mathematics Teacher Exchange Program in mathematics education. The study found that through the ITE, the Shanghai teacher was given the opportunity to critically reflect on teaching approaches as they relate to different curriculum design structures, assessment methods, and types of classroom engagement with students. The ITE helped expand the Shanghai teacher's pedagogical sense and provided challenging experiences to develop adaptive methods the Shanghai teacher could apply at home. This process helped to increase their professional growth and intercultural competence.

Finally, teachers participating in international teaching experiences have to face various challenges to achieve professional transformation. Wu and Gao (2025) researched the experiences of language teachers who participated in transnational teaching programs in the United States. The results showed that although teachers initially faced barriers in cultural, linguistic, and institutional forms, these became opportunities for teachers to grow and adapt. Teachers eventually developed greater intercultural understanding, enhanced resilience, and improved innovative instructional strategies. Therefore, the study concluded that ITEs are an essential mechanism for shaping teachers' professional identities and developing their views of education from a global perspective.

International Teacher Learning and Experiences in Exchange and Partnership Programs

The development of international teacher exchange and partnership programs remains a high priority, as they serve as an important platform for teachers to engage in professional development, intercultural relations, and pedagogy. These programs allow educators time to reflect on their practices, learn about different educational systems, and develop instructional strategies informed by experiences in other cultures. Recent qualitative research shows how international experiences affect teachers' reflection on their practice, mentoring relationships, and professional development.

In one qualitative study conducted by Keshav Prasad Acharya, Prakash Raj Bhatt, and Madhav Acharya (2024), science teachers were asked about their experiences with critical reflection while teaching science. This research demonstrated that reflective practices helped teachers to review how they delivered instruction and to modify their teaching methods in light of different pedagogical contexts. Through narrative accounts and reflective dialogue, teachers could identify challenges they faced in their classrooms and develop plans to address them. The authors indicated that reflection was an important component of professional development and particularly relevant to teachers engaged in teacher exchange programs, given that these teachers often experience different teaching environments.

In a similar study, Lindsay Parker, Shan Xu, and Chao Chi (2022) studied Chinese preservice teachers' perceptions of mentoring relationships within an international learning partnership. Their research findings indicated that mentoring interactions had a profound impact on participants' self-perceptions as teachers and on their professional competence and confidence. The authors suggested that developing supportive mentoring relationships enables preservice teachers to observe diverse teaching styles, receive constructive feedback, and become more interculturally competent. These findings provide further support for establishing structured mentoring relationships in international teacher exchange programs, with experienced educators helping preservice teachers improve their learning outcomes.

In another research study, conducted by Carolin Mantel, Elisabeth Kamm, and Christina Bieri Buschor (2024), the authors investigated the potential and challenges of international teaching internships for preservice teachers. Their research shows that international teaching placements promote the development of professional competencies such as intercultural awareness, adaptability, and reflective practice. Their research also identified challenges faced by preservice teachers, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and adapting to new workplace expectations (institutional/social/environmental). However, the study concludes that international teaching experiences significantly influence teachers' development by expanding their worldview and stimulating creativity in their teaching.

Also, Jing Tang and Jing Lu (2026) examined teacher learning through the concept of "boundary crossing" between educators in Hong Kong and Guangzhou in the Greater Bay Area of China. This study showed that by engaging in collaborative, cross-regional work, teachers could gain deeper understanding of each other's educational systems and pedagogical frameworks. Boundary crossing allows educators to transfer knowledge from institutional, regional, and/or cultural venues, thereby promoting both innovation and collaborative learning.

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Thus, the results show why international/cross-boundary initiatives are so important for enhancing professionalism and identity as educators.

Qiang Wu and Qing Wu (2025) also examined teacher education, but from multiple perspectives, using convergent analytical methods to analyze teacher education for ethnically diverse practitioners. Factors such as cultural responsiveness, the formation of teachers' professional identities, and culturally responsive pedagogy were found to influence how teachers are prepared and to be effective in a multicultural educational environment. This study's findings highlight the importance of being aware of various cultural perspectives when preparing teachers for multicultural educational contexts, especially regarding international teacher exchanges.

Global Perspectives on Teacher Exchange Programs

Exchanging teachers among schools broadens collaboration in the Professional Development of Teachers worldwide. Chen and Constantin (2024) pointed out that initiation of exchanges among schools helps to develop universities internationally through educators who engage across International Borders. Their research found that by developing strategic promotions, structures, and Programs to allow for the International Mobility of teachers, they have an opportunity to share teaching methodologies and develop perspectives through a cross-cultural lens while also generating new global connections. By doing so, they enhance their teaching and contribute positively to their image as an institution worldwide.

In an additional example, Ionescu, Moga, and Ispas (2025) analyzed the results of the Erasmus teacher-exchange programs with specific attention on the role of teacher mobility in the development of an educator's competence. Results indicate that those who participate in the teacher exchange program benefit in terms of Professional Development, Intercultural Awareness, and instruction. Specifically, results demonstrate that teachers who participate in international mobility grow in their capacity to adapt and Work Collaboratively, thus enhancing their effectiveness as Teachers and Educators at their respective institutions.

The significance of Intercultural Exchange on the outcome of teacher exchange programs has been explored by Wermer and O'Dowd (2025). They participated in research evaluating the use of Virtual Exchange programs to facilitate an Intercultural Exchange between Pre-Service Teachers and Experienced teachers across geographical borders. Findings indicate that the Virtual Exchange Initiatives Assist in Reciprocal Learning, i.e., both groups of individual(s) will benefit from their experiences and Reflective discussions. This exchange provides participants with increased cultural sensitivity and the ability to develop innovative teaching methodologies through cross-cultural collaboration.

Likewise, Merzliakova, Gradovski, and Ødegaard (2022) investigated Cross-Border Education Collaborations between the Teacher Training programs in Northern Norway and Northern Russia. The results of their research demonstrate that International Cooperation among Educators enables the development of an enhanced awareness of Educational Philosophies shaped by cultural perspectives, teaching methodologies, and Curriculum

Development. Participating educators share Learning Materials to deepen their understanding of international cooperation in their teaching and learning.

Finally, Ingrisich-Rupp and Symeonidis (2025) conducted an analysis of the expanding field of Virtual Exchange in Teacher Education. Their findings indicate that Virtual Exchange Programs provide opportunities for Global Interaction to be accessible to individuals as well as to Educators working in Collaboration across International Borders without being limited by physical travel. The findings suggest that these programs increase teachers' Digital Competence, improve their Intercultural Communication Skills, and therefore create an enhanced, collaborative Learning Experience for both teachers who participate in these programs and the future Educators they train.

Teacher Competence and Exchange Programs

Multiple studies have established that teacher competence and global exposure are essential to developing teachers' pedagogical effectiveness. Lei and Jiang (2025) conducted research on the technology competence of Foreign Language teachers at Chinese universities, and identified key aspects that affect foreign language teachers' ability to integrate technology into the foreign language curriculum. They found that continuous development in their teaching abilities is a major contributor to global teaching practices (Lei & Jiang, 2025).

Additionally, Brown (2023) researched English teachers through the JET Program; he examined how teachers conceptualize the imagined community of English use through instructional materials and showed that teachers who have been exposed to outside teaching experiences have changed their linguistic or cultural perspectives.

The influence of an international faculty member on the student learning experience has also been studied. Pratama, Rizqa, and Nurul Bahiyah (2023) analyzed the Visiting Professor Program in Environmental Science and found that having visiting professors could enhance students' problem-solving skills and engagement through a multitude of instructional perspectives and a global perspective.

Jie and Zeng (2025) focused on the intelligibility of South Asian Englishes to Chinese preservice teachers; their findings suggested that through international collaborations, gaining experience with different varieties of English enhances sustainability in language education and intercultural awareness.

Finally, Siyuan (2026) examined preservice teachers' development of language assessment literacy and how the process of formative assessment design was enhanced through international exchange experiences, which provided preservice teachers with opportunities to learn from varying perspectives and methodologies of assessment.

Together, these studies suggest that international teacher exchange programs, technology competence, and exposure to diverse educational experiences are effective in developing professionalism, intercultural competence, and student-centered learning among teachers.

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METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study utilized the descriptive qualitative research design, specifically the narrative inquiry approach. With a focus on the personal narratives of participating educators, narrative inquiry, a qualitative research approach, offers a nuanced exploration of their experiences, perspectives, and challenges within the exchange program. This method is highly relevant to your study, "Teacher Exchange Program Through the Lens of International Educators." Through narrative inquiry, you can find the contextual intricacies and many meanings hidden in their experiences, authentically capturing the program's impact on their teaching practices and professional development (Connelly & Clandinin, 2019; Sparkes & Smith, 2018).

Respondents of the Study

Research participants in this study were called conversation partners "C.P."). A group of three to six people provides a broader spectrum of data for analysis (Saldaña, 2011). How many participants are enough can depend on many factors, but if the researcher has sufficient interview data, whether from one person to twenty, an adequate corpus for analysis can be attained (Saldaña, 2011). Specifically, the participants were the ten (10) selected international exchange teachers assigned to different schools under Baboquivari Unified School District. The researcher selected the participants based on the following inclusion criteria: 1) The participant is a bonafide international exchange teacher assigned to Baboquivari Unified School District, Arizona; 2) The participants must have experienced teaching in their originating country prior to the teacher exchange program; 3) They are willing to participate and be part of the study, thus considering the participation voluntary. This research employed purposive sampling to select the individual sample.

Research Instruments

To establish the validity of the research instrument, five validators, considered experts in the field of education, were asked to validate the interview protocol and interview questions. The validators used the criteria set forth by Goods and Scates which was used as an outline in assessing the data-gathering instrument. The structured interview guide received a rating of 4.78, which was considered excellent and was deemed acceptable for this study. For this study, the researcher transcribed the participants' recorded interviews and presented them individually. Additional information was added, or erroneous transcriptions were revised accurately as the participants validated and affirmed their answers. This process reoccurred until data saturation was achieved.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher prepared the interview guide questions and necessary communication for the study. Once approval for the study was obtained, a letter was sent to the office of the Superintendent of the Baboquivari Unified School District and the school heads of the selected schools where the study would be conducted. Data were collected from the teachers through face-to-face or virtual interviews, depending on their preferences. The participants were given

approximately one to two hours to answer the interview-guide questions, with no time constraints imposed. Throughout the interviews, verbal process consent was obtained, allowing for ongoing negotiation and affirmation of the written consent, in line with the principles of phenomenological research and respect for participants' rights. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Participants were assured of confidentiality regarding their answers. Reflective journaling was used during data analysis to record interview excerpts and personal reflections, thereby contributing to the credibility and honesty of the research. Member checking and journaling served as a review pathway for ethical and methodological decision-making. The researchers organized the results into thematic clusters while maintaining participant confidentiality by not disclosing their names. Interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience, and data were captured using video and audio recorders. After data collection, the recorded interviews were transcribed into written conversations and then translated. The gathered data were coded, categorized, and thematized. Following the steps of phenomenology, member checking was conducted to verify the accuracy and truthfulness of the data, which were further analyzed and presented thematically.

Data Analysis

The collected information was analyzed using a qualitative approach, wherein it was systematically coded, organized, and categorized into themes. This process adhered to the fundamental principles of manual coding and thematic analysis. The analysis process adhered to Colaizzi's (1978) unique seven-step process, which provides a rigorous analysis, with each step staying close to the data. The result is a concise yet all-encompassing description of the phenomenon under study, validated by the participants who created it. The method depends on rich first-person accounts of experience; these may come from face-to-face interviews but can also be obtained in other ways, such as written narratives, blogs, research diaries, online interviews, etc. It includes the following:

1. *Familiarization.* The researcher familiarizes himself with the data by reading through all the participant accounts several times.
2. *It identified significant statements.* The researcher identifies all statements in the accounts that directly relate to the phenomenon under investigation.
3. *The researcher formulated meanings.* The researcher identifies meanings relevant to the phenomenon by carefully considering the significant statements. The researcher had reflexively "bracketed" his pre-suppositions to stick closely to the phenomenon as experienced (though Colaizzi recognizes that complete bracketing is impossible).
4. *Clustering themes.* The researcher clusters the identified meanings into common themes across all accounts. Again, bracketing presuppositions is crucial, especially to avoid any potential influence of existing Theory.
5. *The researcher developed detailed descriptions.* The researcher writes a comprehensive, inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all themes generated in step 4.
6. *It had produced the fundamental structure.* The researcher condensed the detailed description into a short, dense statement that captures the essential aspects of the phenomenon's structure.
7. *It sought verification of the fundamental structure.* The researcher returns the fundamental structure statement to all participants (or sometimes a subsample in more

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extensive studies) to ask whether it captures their experience. He may modify earlier steps in the analysis based on this feedback.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the study results from the in-depth qualitative analysis of the key informants' general feedback to answer the problems formulated for investigation.

The qualitative data from key informants in this study were analyzed by grouping similar feedback. Themes were then formulated based on participants' reflective insights. The findings are supported by teachers' feedback, which relates to core themes perceived as necessary. The researcher observed and synthesized the data, highlighting similarities and differences in participants' ideas.

The motivation of the teachers to participate in the Teacher Exchange Program (TEP)

The first research problem investigated the factors that drive teachers to participate in the Teacher Exchange Program (TEP). The researcher hypothesized that a combination of personal and professional growth desires, financial incentives, and the appeal of travel opportunities was a significant motivator. Through interviews with teachers, the researcher gathered insights into their experiences and synthesized the information, identifying key themes that influenced their participation. These themes included professional growth, high salary, and travel opportunities.

Professional and Career Growth. Teachers expressed excitement about the prospects of professional and career growth in a new environment, highlighting a strong value for skill development, exposure to diverse teaching practices, and overall career advancement. This finding aligns with the study of Mantel, Kamm, and Bieri Buschor (2024), which emphasized that international teaching internships and exchange programs provide significant learning opportunities and professional growth for future teachers. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2022) found that participation in international exchange programs enhanced teacher candidates' understanding of educational practices and encouraged reflective professional development, suggesting that exposure to different teaching contexts strengthens teachers' pedagogical skills.

High Salary and Financial Independence. Monetary incentives were also prominent in motivating teachers to join the TEP. Participants indicated that higher salaries and the potential for financial independence were essential considerations in their decision-making. This aligns with findings from Chen and Constantin (2024), who highlighted that the strategic marketing of teacher exchange programs often emphasizes competitive remuneration as a key motivator for participation, demonstrating that financial rewards are a tangible factor in attracting educators to international assignments.

Opportunity to Travel Places. The chance to travel and experience new cultures emerged as another significant motivator. Teachers reported that exploring different environments and broadening their cultural horizons contributed to personal enrichment and satisfaction. This is consistent with Brown (2023), who observed that international programs, such as the JET Programme, not only facilitate professional development but also promote

intercultural understanding, highlighting the value of experiential learning and global exposure for teacher motivation.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that teachers' participation in the TEP is driven by an interplay of professional development aspirations, financial incentives, and the desire for personal and cultural enrichment, corroborating insights from previous studies on international teacher exchange programs.

The challenges teachers face during their participation in the TEP include the challenges related to teacher-student relations and the classroom environment.

Participation in a Teacher Education Program (TEP) can pose various challenges for teachers, particularly regarding teacher-student relationships and the classroom environment. Building a rapport with students is crucial for effective teaching and learning. However, teachers in TEP may encounter challenges in establishing meaningful connections with students, especially if they are new to teaching or working with diverse student populations. Key themes that emerged as challenges for teachers during their participation in the TEP included cultural differences, feelings of loneliness, resilience, and determination. Overall, the statement's thematic insights revolve around the challenges posed by cultural differences, the loneliness experienced while away from loved ones, and the significance of adjusting to a new environment, the education system, engaging with learners, food, and workmates.

Cultural Differences. Several studies support the finding that cultural differences significantly impact teachers' experiences in international programs. For example, Brown (2023) explored how English teachers in the JET Program navigated imagined communities of English use, highlighting how differing cultural expectations shaped classroom interactions and teaching approaches. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2022) examined the impacts of an international exchange program on Chinese teacher candidates, finding that cultural disparities influenced how teachers adapted their pedagogical strategies and communication styles. These studies reinforce the idea that cultural differences pose challenges to establishing rapport and engaging learners effectively in TEP contexts.

Feeling Lonely. The emotional challenges of being away from familiar environments are echoed in the literature. Acharya, Bhatt, and Acharya (2024) identified that science teachers participating in international programs often experience isolation, emphasizing the need for resilience and reflective practices to cope with feelings of loneliness. Mantel, Kamm, and Bieri Buschor (2024) also found that international teaching internships require teachers to adapt to unfamiliar social and professional contexts, highlighting the importance of emotional support and personal determination during program participation.

Adjustments and Challenges in a New Environment. Teachers face multiple adjustment challenges when entering new educational and cultural settings. Shi and Jain (2023) observed that Chinese teachers in the China–England mathematics exchange needed to navigate unfamiliar curricula, classroom behaviors, and communication norms, mirroring the adjustment difficulties highlighted in this study. Parker, Xu, and Chi (2022) also documented those pre-service teachers in international partnerships had to rapidly adapt to new mentoring systems and institutional expectations, underscoring the need for flexibility, problem-solving skills, and resilience in TEP participation.

Cultural Exploration and Interaction. Participating in TEP not only presents challenges but also provides opportunities for cultural exploration and interaction. Werner and O'Dowd (2025) highlighted that intercultural virtual exchanges allowed student teachers and in-service teachers to engage in mutual learning, promoting cultural understanding and professional growth. Devlin-Foltz and Lunn (2021) also noted that science teachers participating in global

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programs gained transformative experiences through exposure to new educational environments and cross-cultural interactions, which enhanced both personal and professional perspectives. These findings align with participants' reflections on how cultural immersion broadened their outlook, fostered appreciation for diversity, and encouraged self-reflection on their own cultural upbringing.

How effective is the TEP application and selection process from the perspective of international exchange teachers?

It highlights the positive impact of steps such as screening calls and interviews in helping employers find the appropriate candidate for the position. The selection process is considered successful in identifying the right candidate for the position. This implies that the steps involved in the process effectively help employers make decisions. The theme that emerged from the teachers' insights includes collaboration with an agency, the selection process focused on experience-based factors, and the lack of emphasis on other factors.

Collaboration with an Agency. The effectiveness of collaborating with an agency during the TEP application and selection process is consistent with findings in prior studies. For instance, Mantel, Kamm, and Bieri Buschor (2024) emphasized that international teaching internships for future teachers are enhanced when intermediaries facilitate administrative and logistical tasks, allowing teachers to focus on professional preparation and pedagogical readiness. Similarly, Chen and Constantin (2024) highlighted that universities employing structured marketing strategies and agency support for teacher exchange programs ensure a smoother recruitment and placement process, enhancing both institutional and teacher satisfaction. These studies align with the participants' perception that agencies, such as Bepauche International, provide critical guidance and streamline the hiring process, from interviews to document processing, thereby improving overall effectiveness.

Selection Process Focused on Experience-Based Factors. The prioritization of formal credentials and language proficiency in the selection process mirrors the approaches reported in international contexts. Zhou et al. (2022) found that Chinese teacher candidates perceived international exchange programs to emphasize formal qualifications and teaching skills as core determinants of successful placements, which shaped their understanding and practice in science education. Similarly, Shi and Jain (2023) observed that in the China–England mathematics teacher exchange, selection processes focused heavily on credentials and prior teaching experience, which participants acknowledged as key factors for ensuring teaching competence abroad. These studies support the finding that TEP selection relies on experience-based and credentials-oriented criteria.

Lack of Emphasis on Other Factors. While the current TEP process emphasizes credentials and interviews, other aspects, such as cultural adaptability, specific teaching skills, and broader professional competencies, appear underrepresented. This observation is reflected in Acharya, Bhatt, and Acharya (2024), who noted that critical reflection and context-specific teaching skills are essential components of professional growth in science teachers but are often overlooked in formal selection processes. Additionally, Werner and O'Dowd (2025) highlighted that virtual and intercultural teacher exchanges require attention to collaborative and interpersonal skills, not just formal qualifications, to enhance mutual learning and professional development. These studies suggest that incorporating broader evaluation criteria could further strengthen the TEP selection process by acknowledging skills beyond paper credentials and interview performance.

The impact of the Teacher Exchange Program (TEP) on the professional development of international exchange teachers.

The Teacher Exchange Program (TEP) had a significant impact on the professional development of international exchange teachers. It empowered them with new skills, expanded their teaching horizons, and fostered a global perspective in their approach to education. The TEP played a pivotal role in shaping these teachers into well-rounded and adaptable professionals through professional development opportunities, collaboration with educators, and immersion in different cultures.

Redesigned Teaching Approaches and Method Integration. TEP facilitated a transformation in teachers' instructional approaches, encouraging the integration of innovative teaching techniques with established methods. This aligns with Mantel, Kamm, and Bieri Buschor (2024), who found that international teaching internships allow teachers to explore diverse teaching methodologies and adapt them to their home contexts. Participants in TEP combined practical strategies acquired abroad with their personal teaching style, enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes, echoing Mantel et al.'s findings regarding the potential of international exposure to shape pedagogical flexibility.

Cultural Awareness and Global Citizenship. The program also nurtured cultural awareness and global citizenship among participating teachers. Exposure to diverse educational settings enabled them to develop intercultural competence and sensitivity to different learning environments. Brown (2023) highlights similar outcomes in the JET Program, where engagement with international communities fostered understanding of cultural diversity and enhanced cross-cultural communication skills. TEP participants, like those in Brown's study, reported that navigating foreign contexts strengthened their ability to adapt, collaborate, and view education through a global lens.

Overall, the Teacher Exchange Program had a transformative effect on professional development, combining skill enhancement, innovative teaching approaches, personal growth, and global perspectives. The experiences documented in TEP resonate with existing literature on teacher exchange programs, reinforcing the value of international exposure in shaping well-rounded, adaptable, and culturally competent educators (Acharya et al., 2024; Brown, 2023; Mantel et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The findings revealed valuable insights into teachers' experiences participating in the program. The following conclusions were drawn:

According to the narrative insights from the teachers, the ability to travel, high pay, and financial freedom, and professional and career progress were the three primary motivators for teachers to engage in the TEP. Teachers were motivated to learn new skills, improve their careers, receive financial compensation, and enrich their lives by experiencing diverse cultures and settings. These results are consistent with other research highlighting the benefits of cross-cultural competence, critical viewpoints on education, and language ability in international teaching experiences.

Teachers have encountered difficulties and learn some strategies when taking part in the TEP. The most significant difficulties were adjusting to a new environment, feeling lonely, and experiencing cultural differences. Teachers needed help adjusting to other teaching philosophies, missing loved ones, and navigating strange cultural norms and institutions. The results, however, also emphasized the value of resilience, tenacity, and adaptability in

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overcoming these obstacles. The study stressed the need for adequate support structures and professional development opportunities to help teachers succeed in the program.

The third theme or topic that emerged focused on the TEP's opportunities. Teachers profited from job advancement, cultural exploration and connection, and personal and professional development. The initiative enabled educators to advance their careers, interact with people from diverse cultures, and broaden their horizons. These changes helped them develop as both educators and people in general.

Recommendations

Based on the findings mentioned above and conclusions, the following recommendations are advanced:

For the Superintendent, enhancing support systems for international exchange teachers is crucial. Comprehensive support, such as cultural orientation, mentorship programs, and ongoing check-ins, can help achieve this. The Superintendent can ensure these teachers receive the assistance they need to succeed in their new setting by effectively addressing their needs and problems. Promoting cultural awareness among faculty and students is also crucial. The Superintendent can build an open and inviting environment that celebrates diversity and encourages intercultural learning by providing cultural awareness training to all stakeholders.

For the School Heads, the supportive environment they foster for international exchange teachers is crucial. They may encourage a friendly, open environment where employees and students embrace diversity. Opportunities for mutual understanding and development can be created through promoting cross-cultural learning and engagement. Additionally, school administrators should support professional development that is especially suited to the requirements of teachers on international exchange programs. School Heads can help teachers improve their teaching abilities and cultural competency by offering training sessions, workshops, and networking opportunities, resulting in a satisfying experience for teachers and the school community.

For Teachers participating in international exchange programs, it is essential to embrace cultural immersion. They can gain a deeper understanding and respect for the host culture by actively participating in cultural experiences, including learning the local language, engaging in local activities, and building friendships with co-workers and students from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, teachers should take advantage of the district or school's professional development opportunities. They can improve their teaching skills and broaden their perspectives by participating in workshops, conferences, and training programs, thereby enriching their teaching practice.

Future Researchers can contribute to the field by focusing on longitudinal studies. Understanding the long-term effects of Teacher Exchange Programs (TEPs) on the professional growth, career trajectories, and cultural competency of international exchange teachers would be highly beneficial. It would also be helpful to look into the efficacy of the support systems, mentoring programs, and professional development opportunities offered to overseas exchange teachers. Future TEP design and implementation would be more effective by identifying the elements that make an experience rewarding and successful. Additionally, comparative studies

across nations and educational environments can offer a thorough understanding of the program's efficacy, enabling informed changes and adjustments.

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