

Teaching English Language Arts Across Cultures: Acculturative Challenges and Pedagogical Adaptation among Filipino Exchange Teachers in U.S. Public Schools

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Abstract

This study examined the acculturative challenges and pedagogical adjustments of Filipino exchange teachers teaching English Language Arts to native English-speaking students in Broward County Public Schools, Florida, USA. The study used a descriptive phenomenological design with 12 Filipino exchange teachers selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were generated primarily through semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim, coded iteratively, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Trustworthiness was supported through bracketing, peer review, member checking, an audit trail, and reflective documentation. Six themes emerged: teaching strategies and methods; professional growth and rewards; cultural differences and classroom dynamics; cultural adjustment and understanding; challenges in language teaching; and adaptation to the educational system and curriculum. Participants described shifts toward student-centered instruction, differentiated and multimedia-supported teaching, simplified and explicit communication, stricter time management, and greater sensitivity to informal discourse and classroom participation norms. Mentorship, district training, and continuous professional learning were central to successful adjustment. Findings show that acculturation is not merely cultural accommodation but a reciprocal professional learning process that reshapes teacher identity, pedagogy, communication, and resilience in transnational classrooms and strengthens intercultural professional competence.

Keywords: *Acculturation; Filipino exchange teachers; English Language Arts; international teacher mobility; intercultural competence; teacher identity; pedagogical adaptation*

INTRODUCTION

International teacher mobility has become an increasingly important feature of contemporary educational systems. Teacher migration responds to several interconnected conditions, including teacher shortages, globalization, international exchange programs, labor mobility, and schools' growing need for educators who can work effectively within linguistically and culturally heterogeneous learning environments (Bense, 2016; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). International teaching also creates opportunities for teachers to develop intercultural perspectives through direct professional experience in educational systems different from those in which they were originally trained (Cushner, 2007). Nevertheless, crossing national borders does not simply involve transferring established teaching competencies from one setting to another. Internationally mobile teachers must reinterpret professional expectations, curriculum structures, communication conventions, classroom relationships, and institutional cultures while simultaneously reconstructing their identities as legitimate and effective practitioners (Miller, 2009; Yip et al., 2024).

For Filipino teachers participating in cultural exchange programs in the United States, this transition is particularly complex. Their professional preparation, previous teaching experience, familiarity with English, and established pedagogical identities constitute valuable resources. However, entering an American public-school environment exposes them to locally situated expectations regarding classroom discourse, student autonomy, teacher authority, assessment, time management, curriculum

implementation, and interpersonal communication. Thus, competence acquired in one educational culture does not automatically translate into effortless professional adjustment in another.

Acculturation provides a useful conceptual lens for understanding this transition. Berry (1997, 2005) conceptualized acculturation as the psychological and behavioral changes that occur when individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds come into sustained contact. Later scholarship emphasized that acculturation is multidimensional rather than a simple progression from one culture toward another (Sam & Berry, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2010). Cross-cultural adjustment includes both psychological adaptation and sociocultural competence—the ability to function effectively within the host environment's everyday expectations (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Adjustment is therefore influenced by cultural distance, social interaction, institutional support, previous experience, and the individual's strategies for negotiating cultural difference (Black et al., 1991; Demes & Geeraert, 2014; Ward et al., 1998, 2001).

For internationally mobile teachers, acculturation is inseparable from professional identity. Teacher identity develops through continuous interaction among teachers' beliefs, biographies, professional knowledge, institutional environments, and relationships with students and colleagues (Beijaard et al., 2004; Korthagen, 2004; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Varghese et al., 2005). Migration can disrupt previously stable understandings of what it means to be a competent teacher because familiar forms of authority, communication, curriculum interpretation, and pedagogical practice may not produce the same responses in a new educational environment. This disruption can produce vulnerability and uncertainty, but it can also generate professional agency, reflexivity, and growth (Hong, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2009; Miller, 2009; Yip et al., 2024).

This issue is especially significant in English Language Arts (ELA), where language is simultaneously the medium of instruction, the object of disciplinary study, and a marker of professional legitimacy. Historically, English-language teaching has been shaped by distinctions between so-called native and non-native English-speaking teachers (Braine, 2010; Medgyes, 1992; Moussu & Llorca, 2008). More recent scholarship has challenged this dichotomy because it can privilege particular varieties and speaker identities while obscuring multilingual teachers' pedagogical expertise and professional agency (Holliday, 2006; Selvi et al., 2024; Yang & Forbes, 2025). Native-speakerism can influence perceptions of linguistic authority even when internationally mobile teachers possess advanced English proficiency and extensive professional experience (Garton et al., 2025; Lippi-Green, 2012; Phillipson, 1992).

Accordingly, this article retains the term native English-speaking students because it reflects the framing of the original study and the teaching context described by participants. It is not intended to imply that native-speaker status represents a superior or homogeneous linguistic norm. Contemporary perspectives on Global Englishes and translanguaging practice emphasize that English belongs to diverse communities and that effective teaching requires sensitivity to variation, multilingual repertoires, and situated communicative practices (Canagarajah, 2013; Matsuda, 2012).

Intercultural competence is therefore central to understanding Filipino exchange teachers' experiences. Deardorff (2006) conceptualized intercultural competence as involving attitudes, knowledge, skills, and internal and external outcomes that allow individuals to communicate appropriately and effectively across cultural contexts. Byram (1997) similarly emphasized the importance of interpreting, relating, discovering, interacting, and critically evaluating cultural perspectives. For internationally mobile teachers, intercultural competence is not peripheral to professional competence; it shapes how teachers interpret student behavior, negotiate classroom authority, modify communication, and make curricular decisions.

Pedagogical adaptation must also be viewed through culturally responsive perspectives. Effective teaching in culturally heterogeneous classrooms requires educators to recognize students' cultural and linguistic resources rather than assuming a single normative pattern of participation or learning (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant and culturally sustaining approaches emphasize responsiveness, relationality, academic rigor, cultural plurality, and the legitimacy of diverse ways of communicating and knowing (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Linguistically responsive preparation likewise requires teachers to understand language variation and adapt pedagogical practices to learners' communicative needs (Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Nieto, 2017).

Despite the expanding literature on international teacher migration, language-teacher identity, intercultural competence, and culturally responsive pedagogy, comparatively little attention has been directed toward the specific experience of Filipino exchange teachers assigned to teach ELA to students for whom English is their primary language in U.S. public schools. This context produces a distinctive professional situation: teachers who were educated in a multilingual society and extensively trained in English are required to teach the language and its literature within the cultural environment historically associated with many of its dominant institutional norms.

Understanding these teachers' experiences can contribute to scholarship in at least three ways. First, it expands international teacher-mobility research by documenting professional adjustment within an American K–12 public-school context. Second, it complicates deficit-oriented assumptions surrounding internationally educated or so-called non-native English-speaking teachers by emphasizing adaptation as professional learning rather than evidence of professional inadequacy. Third, it offers practical evidence regarding the forms of induction, mentoring, curricular orientation, and professional development that may support internationally recruited teachers.

The study therefore addressed the following research question:

How do Filipino exchange teachers experience and respond to acculturative challenges while teaching English Language Arts to native English-speaking students in U.S. public schools?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a **descriptive phenomenological design** to examine how Filipino exchange teachers experienced cultural, linguistic, curricular, and pedagogical transition while teaching ELA in the United States. Phenomenological inquiry is appropriate when the purpose of research is to describe the meanings participants attribute to a phenomenon they have directly experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than testing predetermined relationships among variables, the design sought to identify shared patterns within participants' accounts while preserving the contextual complexity of their individual experiences.

The phenomenological orientation was also consistent with the study's emphasis on teachers' perceptions, interpretations, professional adjustments, and meaning-making. Bracketing was used as a reflexive strategy to limit the imposition of researcher assumptions on participants' accounts. More broadly, qualitative reflexivity was treated as an ongoing methodological responsibility rather than a single procedural step (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2015).

2.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted within **Broward County Public Schools in Florida, USA**. Participants were assigned to nine schools and taught at elementary, middle-school, and high-school levels. The setting was particularly relevant because it placed Filipino teachers within culturally, linguistically, and socially diverse public-school environments where they had to negotiate local curricular requirements

and classroom expectations while developing relationships with students, colleagues, administrators, and families.

2.3 Participants and Sampling

Twelve Filipino exchange teachers participated in the study. The original selection criteria required participants to:

1. be Filipino exchange teachers working in Broward County Public Schools;
2. have an academic specialization or professional background in English;
3. teach English Language Arts to predominantly native English-speaking students;
4. have at least one year of U.S. exchange-teaching experience; and
5. be willing to discuss their cultural and professional experiences in depth.

Participants were recruited through **purposive and snowball sampling**. Purposive sampling ensured that participants had direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation, while snowball recruitment expanded access to eligible teachers through professional networks. Such purposeful selection is appropriate in phenomenological research because information-rich cases are more valuable than statistical representativeness when the goal is to understand a lived phenomenon in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

The teachers represented different grade levels and schools, providing variation in classroom settings while retaining a common experience as Filipino exchange educators teaching ELA in the same school district.

2.4 Data Collection

Data were generated primarily through **semi-structured interviews**. The interview guide contained core questions concerning:

- significant cultural differences encountered in U.S. schools;
- strategies used to adapt to the American educational environment;
- challenges associated with teaching ELA and communicating with students;
- pedagogical modifications made in response to student needs;
- institutional training and support received;
- rewarding experiences; and
- perceived personal and professional growth.

Semi-structured interviewing was selected because it provides sufficient consistency across participants while allowing the interviewer to probe experiences that emerge during the conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews therefore allowed teachers to narrate experiences in their own terms while follow-up questions clarified meaning and elicited concrete examples.

With participants' permission, the researcher audio-recorded interviews. Field notes documented contextual observations and relevant verbal or non-verbal cues. The researcher transcribed the recordings and repeatedly compared transcripts with the original recordings to correct transcription errors and preserve the meaning of multilingual exchanges.

Data-source delimitation

One section of the dissertation's data-analysis narrative refers to both interviews and focus-group discussions. However, the dissertation abstract, detailed data-gathering procedure, interview appendices, audit trail, and reported findings consistently identify semi-structured interviews as the principal empirical source. To avoid attributing evidence to a procedure not independently documented in the supplied source, this article reports the findings as **interview-derived data**.

2.5 Data Analysis

The authors analyzed interview data using thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke's framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analysis proceeded through six interconnected phases:

1. **Familiarization with the data.** I reviewed interview recordings and transcripts repeatedly to develop an overall understanding of participants' experiences.
2. **Initial coding.** Meaningful segments of the transcripts were coded to capture experiences such as language barriers, curriculum adjustment, student engagement, classroom authority, support, and professional growth.
3. **Searching for themes.** Related codes were grouped to identify broader patterns across participants.
4. **Reviewing themes.** Candidate themes were checked against coded extracts and the larger dataset for internal coherence and distinction.
5. **Defining and naming themes.** Themes and subthemes were refined to capture the central organizing meaning of the participants' narratives.
6. **Producing the account.** Themes were integrated into an interpretive narrative addressing the research question.

The analysis was iterative rather than purely linear. Coding was refined as relationships among participant accounts became clearer. The systematic use of codes supported analytic transparency (Saldaña, 2021), while later developments in reflexive thematic analysis informed attention to the researcher's active interpretive role (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021).

2.6 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Several procedures strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings. First, **bracketing and reflective documentation** identified assumptions that could influence interpretation. Second, an **audit trail** documented decisions made during data collection, transcription, coding, theme development, and report preparation. Third, **peer review** was used during coding and thematic interpretation. Fourth, **member checking** allowed participants to review preliminary interpretations and confirm whether the themes adequately reflected their experiences.

These procedures addressed credibility, dependability, and confirmability within the qualitative inquiry tradition (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher maintained reflexive documentation throughout the study to make the interpretive role visible, rather than presenting thematic analysis as a mechanically objective procedure.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and the researcher obtained informed consent before data collection. Participants were informed of the research purpose, procedures, confidentiality protections, and their right to withdraw. The researcher removed identifying information or replaced it with participant labels, and handled research materials confidentially.

The researcher also recognized that discussion of migration, adjustment, professional difficulty, and cultural difference could evoke discomfort. Interviews were therefore approached sensitively, with participants retaining control over the extent of their disclosure.

The source documents provided for this article describe informed-consent and confidentiality procedures but do **not report an institutional ethics-review approval number**. Consequently, no approval identifier is stated here. If the authors obtained institutional research ethics approval or an exemption, they should insert the exact committee name and reference number before journal submission.

3. Results

The thematic analysis generated **six interrelated themes** describing how Filipino exchange teachers negotiated the cultural, pedagogical, linguistic, and institutional demands of teaching ELA in U.S. public schools.

Theme	Subthemes	Core Meaning
1. Teaching Strategies and Methods	Effective Teaching Strategies; Curriculum Understanding and local curriculum expectations to increase Adaptation	Teachers modified pedagogy and learned access and engagement.
2. Professional Growth and Rewards	Rewards of Teaching; Personal and Professional Impact	Adaptation produced satisfaction, resilience, confidence, and expanded professional competence.
3. Cultural Differences and Classroom Dynamics	Communication Style; Authority and Participation	Teachers renegotiated interactional norms, classroom authority, and expectations for student voice.
4. Cultural Adjustment and Understanding	Punctuality and Time Management; Student expectations required deliberate behavioral Engagement and Connection adaptation.	Everyday institutional and relational adaptation.
5. Challenges in Language Teaching	Language Barriers and Communication	Difficulties centered on pragmatic, colloquial, and instructional communication rather than simply grammatical proficiency.
6. Adaptation to the Educational System Curriculum	Support and Training	Mentoring, district training, workshops, and professional development accelerated adjustment.

3.1 Theme 1: Teaching Strategies and Methods

Effective Teaching Strategies

Participants described pedagogical adaptation as an immediate and continuing requirement. Their responses showed that effective instruction depended not on abandoning previous expertise but on expanding their instructional repertoire.

Teachers reported using multimedia resources, group activities, project-based learning, online tools, visual materials, differentiated activities, graphic organizers, modeling, and structured scaffolding. Some described a participant-named “**I do, We Do, You Do It Together, and You Do**” procedure in which instruction moved between teacher modeling, learner performance, and collaborative completion. Others adjusted lesson pace and complexity or provided additional examples when students needed more explicit support.

Technology supported both engagement and access. Multimedia presentations, web resources, and digital translation tools supported learners with different needs. Participants teaching students receiving English-language or special-education services also described modifying instructions and providing additional accommodations.

These adaptations demonstrate that teaching in the new environment required flexible decision-making. Rather than relying on a single preferred method, teachers combined visual, collaborative, technological, differentiated, and experiential strategies based on classroom needs.

Curriculum Understanding and Adaptation

Participants also struggled to understand the pace, organization, and changing requirements of the U.S. curriculum. Adjustment required sustained learning rather than a one-time orientation.

Training sessions, curriculum discussions, professional-development activities, and consultation with colleagues helped teachers interpret expected learning outcomes, instructional practices, and assessment requirements. Curriculum adaptation therefore operated at two levels: teachers had to

understand what the school system expected while also deciding how to make those expectations pedagogically workable for their students.

3.2 Theme 2: Professional Growth and Rewards

Rewards of Teaching

Although participants described considerable adjustment demands, their narratives were not dominated by difficulty. Student achievement emerged as a major source of professional satisfaction.

Teachers reported fulfillment when students improved academically, performed well on assessments, developed greater confidence, or showed increased interest in English and literature. Student development validated the effort participants invested in adapting their instruction.

The rewarding dimension of the exchange-teaching experience is important because it shows that professional transition was not experienced merely as cultural stress. Successful teaching interactions gradually provided evidence that participants could be effective within the new educational environment.

Personal and Professional Impact

Participants linked their U.S. teaching experiences to increased adaptability, resilience, teaching competence, and cross-cultural communication skills. Navigating unfamiliar expectations required them to reconsider established assumptions, experiment with new practices, and develop greater confidence in responding to diverse learners.

Professional growth was therefore intertwined with personal transformation. Teachers became more aware of cultural differences, more flexible in instructional decision-making, and more reflective about the relationship between pedagogy and context.

3.3 Theme 3: Cultural Differences and Classroom Dynamics

Communication Style

One of the most salient adjustments concerned classroom communication. Participants perceived U.S. student communication as more direct and informal than the forms of teacher–student interaction to which they had previously been accustomed.

Colloquial expressions, slang, conversational speed, and informal interaction initially created difficulties. Some teachers reported intentionally learning local expressions and becoming more familiar with students' communicative patterns. They also modified their own communication by simplifying explanations, clarifying instructions, and adopting a more conversational style when appropriate.

The challenge was therefore not simply “knowing English.” It involved understanding **pragmatic and sociocultural uses of English** within a particular community of students.

Authority and Participation

Participants also described adjusting their understanding of classroom authority. They perceived their earlier teaching experiences as comparatively teacher-directed, whereas their U.S. classrooms placed stronger emphasis on student voice, discussion, questioning, and active participation.

Teachers consequently increased opportunities for learners to express opinions, work collaboratively, and assume greater responsibility during lessons. For some participants, this represented a substantial change in classroom-management philosophy. Effective authority increasingly involved establishing routines and expectations while creating space for student agency rather than relying primarily on hierarchical teacher positioning.

3.4 Theme 4: Cultural Adjustment and Understanding

Punctuality and Time Management

Participants identified structured scheduling and strict adherence to time as another element of institutional adjustment. Meetings, classes, transitions, deadlines, and instructional periods required careful management.

The significance of this theme lies less in comparing two national cultures than in demonstrating that seemingly routine institutional practices can become important acculturative demands. Teachers must learn not only formal policies but also the everyday rhythms through which schools organize professional expectations.

Student Engagement and Connection

Establishing relationships with students required participants to learn how students responded to instructions, teacher feedback, classroom tasks, and interpersonal interaction.

Teachers reported simplifying language, making directions more explicit, adjusting lesson difficulty, providing examples, using interactive approaches, and varying activities to maintain engagement. The process of building connection therefore depended on communicative clarity and responsiveness rather than merely delivering subject content.

3.5 Theme 5: Challenges in Language Teaching

Language Barriers and Communication

Language-related challenges were present even though participants were qualified English educators. Their difficulties centered particularly on slang, idiomatic expressions, colloquial language, interactional expectations, and the need to make instructions immediately understandable within local classroom contexts.

Participants responded through visual aids, gestures, simplified wording, repetition, examples, translation support where appropriate, and increased interaction with local speakers. Over time, familiarity with students' communicative practices improved teachers' confidence and effectiveness.

This theme is especially significant because it distinguishes **linguistic proficiency from sociolinguistic and pragmatic adaptation**. Teachers' challenges should not be interpreted as evidence that they lacked knowledge of English. Rather, they were learning how English functioned within the specific institutional and youth-cultural environment in which they were teaching.

3.6 Theme 6: Adaptation to the Educational System and Curriculum

Support and Training

Institutional support was consistently identified as a major facilitator of successful adjustment. Participants valued district training, seminars, workshops, professional-development sessions, and mentoring relationships that helped them understand curriculum expectations, classroom management, educational culture, and instructional practices.

Mentors were particularly important when they understood the distinctive concerns of internationally recruited teachers. Support reduced the extent to which participants had to learn unfamiliar expectations through trial and error.

The findings therefore indicate that successful acculturation should not be treated solely as an individual teacher's responsibility. Adjustment was enhanced when schools and the district actively provided professional structures that translated institutional expectations and created opportunities for guided learning.

4. Discussion

The findings reveal acculturation as a dynamic form of **professional reconstruction**. Filipino exchange teachers did not simply transplant Philippine teaching practices into American classrooms, nor did they completely replace their previous professional identities with U.S. practices. Instead, they selectively modified communication, pedagogy, classroom routines, and professional behavior while retaining established competencies and values.

4.1 Acculturation as Professional Reconstruction Rather Than Assimilation

Berry's (1997, 2005) acculturation framework helps explain this pattern. Participants' experiences most closely resemble an integrative process in which engagement with the host educational culture occurs alongside continuity in prior identity and professional expertise. This interpretation is consistent with later accounts of acculturation emphasizing multidimensional adaptation rather than unidirectional assimilation (Sam & Berry, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2010).

The teachers' adjustments also illustrate the distinction between psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Learning local classroom routines, communication conventions, scheduling norms, and student-participation expectations represented forms of sociocultural learning. Their growing confidence, resilience, and professional satisfaction reflected an accompanying psychological and identity-related adjustment.

Cross-cultural transition research has long shown that adjustment depends upon interactions among individual resources, previous experiences, cultural distance, social relationships, and organizational support (Black et al., 1991; Demes & Geeraert, 2014; Ward et al., 1998, 2001). The present findings extend this insight into the professional space of K–12 ELA teaching: acculturation occurs not only outside school but through lesson planning, classroom interaction, curriculum interpretation, assessment, mentoring, and day-to-day professional routines.

4.2 Pedagogical Adaptation as Contextual Expertise

The first theme demonstrates that adaptation was strongly pedagogical. Teachers increasingly used differentiation, multimedia, group work, project-based learning, modeling, visual scaffolds, explicit instruction, and student-centered participation.

These strategies are consistent with research emphasizing responsiveness to learner variability. Differentiated instruction requires teachers to modify content, process, product, and learning conditions according to student readiness and needs (Tomlinson, 2014). Similarly, gradual release and modeling approaches make complex tasks visible before learners assume greater responsibility (Fisher & Frey, 2008), while project-based approaches can support collaboration, relevance, and sustained learner engagement (Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

However, the findings should not be read as evidence that Filipino teachers lacked these practices before migration or that one national educational system is intrinsically more student-centered than another. Such conclusions would reproduce cultural stereotypes. The data show that **participants perceived a need to recalibrate the degree, form, and frequency of these practices in response to their specific U.S. classrooms**.

This distinction is consistent with culturally responsive pedagogy. Responsive teaching does not prescribe a universal set of techniques; it requires teachers to understand the learners and communities in front of them and to make appropriate instructional decisions (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant and sustaining approaches further emphasize that students' identities and communicative repertoires should become resources for learning rather than obstacles to be normalized (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017).

For exchange teachers, culturally responsive pedagogy is reciprocal. Teachers must respond to students' cultural practices, while schools must also recognize the cultural and professional knowledge international teachers bring. This mutual orientation avoids positioning the host system as the sole standard against which the incoming teacher is evaluated.

4.3 Language, Legitimacy, and Communicative Adaptation

The finding on language barriers requires particularly careful interpretation. Filipino teachers in the study were English specialists; nevertheless, they reported difficulty with slang, colloquial expressions, conversational styles, and locally expected forms of interaction.

This distinction is central to scholarship challenging the native/non-native speaker binary. Language competence is not reducible to birthplace or first-language status, and pedagogical competence cannot be inferred from accent or conformity to an idealized native-speaker norm (Braine, 2010; Medgyes, 1992; Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Native-speakerism can delegitimize highly qualified teachers by treating particular accents and cultural identities as evidence of inferior expertise (Holliday, 2006; Selvi et al., 2024).

The present participants' accounts instead demonstrate **communicative adaptation**. They were learning the pragmatic meanings of youth language, informal interaction, local expressions, discourse speed, and classroom norms. These are contextual competencies that any educator entering an unfamiliar linguistic community may need to acquire.

Global Englishes and translingual perspectives further challenge the assumption that legitimate English belongs exclusively to one national group (Canagarajah, 2013; Matsuda, 2012). Teachers' Philippine linguistic backgrounds may therefore be understood as additional intercultural resources rather than deficits. Nonetheless, because professional legitimacy is socially negotiated, internationally mobile teachers may still experience pressure to conform to dominant linguistic expectations (Lippi-Green, 2012; Phillipson, 1992).

Recent scholarship continues to document how native-speakerism shapes teacher positioning, identity, and professional agency (Garton et al., 2025; Yang & Forbes, 2025). The present study adds an unusual dimension to this literature: the participants were not primarily teaching English as a foreign language. They were teaching **English Language Arts to students already socialized into American English**, making pragmatic adaptation and professional identity negotiation especially visible.

4.4 Teacher Identity, Agency, and Professional Growth

The second theme demonstrates that transnational teaching was transformative. Participants described greater resilience, adaptability, cross-cultural communication, and professional confidence.

Teacher identity is continuously reconstructed through interaction between biography and context (Beijaard et al., 2004; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Varghese et al., 2005). When established professional assumptions meet unfamiliar classroom norms, teachers may initially feel vulnerable or disrupted (Kelchtermans, 2009). Such disruption can still become a catalyst for reflection and identity development when teachers can exercise agency.

Research on immigrant teachers similarly indicates that professional transition involves negotiating institutional status, professional knowledge, perceived social position, and beliefs about teaching (Yip et al., 2024). Miller (2009) described international teacher migration as involving shock, turbulence, resistance, and eventual adaptation, while Hong (2010) showed that professional identity is closely connected to teachers' interpretations of their working conditions and capacity to remain effective practitioners.

The Filipino teachers' accounts are consistent with this identity-reconstruction perspective. Their satisfaction in seeing students succeed provided evidence of professional competence in the new environment. Success did more than provide emotional reward; it contributed to reconstructing a credible professional self.

Korthagen (2004) argued that good teaching cannot be reduced to isolated competencies because professional identity, mission, beliefs, and context are deeply intertwined. In the present study,

pedagogical adaptation therefore became identity work. Each successful modification—from adjusting communication to encouraging greater student participation—helped teachers reinterpret who they were as educators in the American context.

4.5 Intercultural Competence as a Core Teaching Capability

Participants' experiences also demonstrate the practical dimensions of intercultural competence. Understanding a new school culture required openness, observation, communication, reflection, and willingness to revise assumptions.

Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence emphasizes the ability to interpret cultural practices, relate perspectives, discover new meanings, and interact effectively across difference. Deardorff's (2006) process model similarly positions respect, openness, knowledge, skills, and adaptability as foundations for appropriate intercultural behavior.

The findings illustrate these competencies in daily teaching. Participants learned to interpret student directness differently, reconsider assumptions about authority, understand unfamiliar participation patterns, adjust communicative choices, and negotiate new curriculum expectations.

This has implications for teacher preparation. Linguistically responsive teacher education should prepare educators not only to understand language structure but also to recognize sociolinguistic variation and the relationships among language, culture, identity, and power (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Multicultural education likewise requires educators to examine their own assumptions while developing knowledge of students' cultural contexts (Nieto, 2017).

For Filipino teachers entering exchange programs, intercultural preparation should therefore begin **before departure**, continue during induction, and remain available throughout the exchange period.

4.6 Institutional Support as Acculturation Infrastructure

One of the strongest practical findings is the importance of training, mentoring, and professional development. Participants repeatedly described district workshops, seminars, and mentors as mechanisms that made unfamiliar expectations understandable.

This finding aligns with the broader professional-development literature. Effective professional learning is sustained, context-sensitive, connected to practice, and supported by opportunities for collaboration and reflection (Avalos, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009). Professional development is more likely to influence practice when it addresses teachers' actual instructional challenges rather than delivering disconnected information (Guskey, 2002; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Mentoring is particularly relevant for internationally mobile teachers because many of their questions concern tacit institutional knowledge rather than formal curriculum alone. Evidence on teacher induction suggests that structured mentoring can improve teacher experience and professional outcomes (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Coaching likewise shows substantial potential to influence instructional practice when it provides focused feedback and sustained professional interaction (Kraft et al., 2018).

The implication is important: schools should not conceptualize acculturation as an individual survival test. When an institution recruits teachers internationally, it acquires a corresponding responsibility to provide **acculturation infrastructure**—the organizational structures through which teachers learn the host system without having their prior expertise devalued.

4.7 Implications for Schools and School Districts

The findings suggest several concrete practices.

First, school districts employing international exchange teachers should develop **structured induction specifically for internationally educated teachers**. General new-teacher orientation may be

insufficient because international teachers must understand both organizational procedures and culturally embedded expectations.

Second, induction should address:

- curriculum standards and assessment expectations;
- classroom-management norms;
- student rights and participation;
- parent–teacher communication;
- special education and accommodations;
- youth language and pragmatic communication;
- professional documentation;
- school schedules and time expectations; and
- culturally responsive teaching.

Third, each exchange teacher should have access to a trained **professional mentor** who understands international-teacher transition. Mentoring should be developmental rather than corrective.

Fourth, districts should give exchange teachers opportunities to share their pedagogical and cultural expertise. Acculturation should be reciprocal: schools can learn from international teachers rather than viewing them solely as individuals who need to be adjusted to the host system.

Fifth, teacher-education institutions in the Philippines can integrate intercultural competence, culturally responsive pedagogy, Global Englishes, cross-cultural classroom discourse, and comparative educational systems into preparation programs for educators considering international work.

Finally, professional-development programs should explicitly challenge native-speakerism. Teacher quality should be assessed through professional knowledge, instructional competence, relational effectiveness, reflective capacity, and student learning—not accent, birthplace, or conformity to an idealized linguistic identity.

4.8 Theoretical Implications

The findings suggest that acculturation among internationally mobile teachers is best understood as the interaction of at least four processes:

1. **Sociocultural learning** – acquiring knowledge of routines, expectations, communication patterns, and institutional practices;
2. **Pedagogical recalibration** – modifying instructional strategies in response to curriculum and learner expectations;
3. **Identity negotiation** – reconstructing one's sense of legitimacy and professional competence in a new cultural environment; and
4. **Institutionally mediated adaptation** – using mentoring, professional development, collegial networks, and organizational support to make transition manageable.

This integrated interpretation moves beyond models that locate adaptation exclusively within the individual migrant. Teacher acculturation is produced relationally through interaction among the teacher, students, colleagues, curriculum, school policy, language ideology, and organizational support.

4.9 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should delimit interpretation of the findings.

First, the study involved only 12 teachers within one Florida school district. Phenomenological research prioritizes depth over statistical generalization, so the findings should be treated as contextually situated.

Second, participants were selected purposively and through professional referrals. Teachers with particularly salient experiences or stronger professional networks may have been more likely to participate.

Third, the study relied primarily on self-reported interview data. Classroom observations, administrator interviews, student perspectives, and document analysis could provide useful triangulation in future investigations.

Fourth, the participants were relatively early in their U.S. teaching experience. Longitudinal research should examine whether the challenges and strategies identified here change after three, five, or more years.

Fifth, future research could compare teachers across states, content areas, grade levels, visa arrangements, and sending countries. Comparative research would help distinguish challenges related specifically to Filipino teacher preparation from those characteristic of international teacher transition more generally.

Sixth, researchers should investigate student outcomes and classroom interaction directly. The present study documents teachers' interpretations of successful adaptation but was not designed to test whether particular adjustment strategies produced measurable changes in student achievement.

Finally, the terminology of “native” and “non-native” English speaker warrants continued critical examination. Future research could use more sociolinguistically nuanced approaches to explore how accent, race, nationality, language repertoire, and professional status intersect in the positioning of internationally mobile teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study Filipino exchange teachers in U.S. public schools undergo a multidimensional acculturative process across cultural, linguistic, pedagogical, relational, and professional domains. Despite arriving with extensive teaching experience and English proficiency, these educators navigate locally situated expectations regarding communication, student engagement, classroom management, and curriculum implementation. Rather than indicating professional deficiencies, their adaptation reflects contextual learning—learning the sociocultural grammar of a new educational system. Through professional agency, teachers successfully adjust by differentiating instruction, incorporating innovative media, adapting interaction styles, and engaging in continuous professional development. Ultimately, their ability to navigate these shifts highlights their professional expertise rather than diminishing it.

Successful educational transitions cannot rely solely on individual teacher resilience; they require structural support from host institutions and teacher preparation programs. Schools and districts must offer systematic cultural orientation, curriculum guidance, mentoring, and language-pragmatics assistance, while preparation programs should cultivate intercultural competence and critical awareness of power dynamics. When internationally mobile educators are supported and their prior expertise is respected, cultural differences serve as a catalyst for reciprocal learning and pedagogical innovation. Effective international teaching is not achieved through cultural erasure or forced assimilation, but through reflective negotiation, professional agency, and dedicated institutional support.

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