

BEYOND AND ACROSS ONLINE ENGLISH TEACHING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF ONLINE ENGLISH TEACHERS FROM ESL COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT:

The main objective of the study is to explore the lived experiences of online ESL (English as Second Language) Filipino teachers through a phenomenological inquiry. The participants of this study were seven (7) online ESL Filipino teachers who have been working in the ESL company for at least three years. It was determined from the findings of the study that, initially, what motivated the online ESL Filipino teachers to pursue online English teaching was the salary. But this changed when they got to immerse themselves more in the job, as this job increases their passion for teaching while maintaining their work-life balance. Despite the cultural differences and difficulty in handling their clients, they learned to be more adaptable and flexible in teaching diverse learners. Overall, the ESL teachers acknowledge their work for their holistic development (personal, social, and professional); thus, they find this work a fulfilling job. They further narrated that ESL learners prefer Filipinos' good personalities and language skills.

Keywords: ESL teaching, English as a second language, ESL learning, ESL teacher's experience

INTRODUCTION

The English language, unarguably, is now the official language of commerce in almost all countries [1]. This has increased the demand for the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) in various parts of the world, especially in those countries where English is not the first language [2].

English as a Second Language (ESL) is a program that provides instruction in reading, writing, and conversing with a focus on cultivating conversational and job-related communication skills that offer basic explanations using repetition, demonstrations, and pictures, and commonly being offered to people of all ages [3].

ESL teaching caters to those students from non-English speaking countries who are planning to work or study abroad, which requires certification that they can communicate in English [4]. This is to address concerns that typical East Asian ESL/EFL students with low L2 speaking proficiency who attend English-speaking universities do not actively participate in in-class activities [5].

The Philippines is among those nations that offer online English teaching. Along with the call center agents, online English teachers in the Philippines have established a status in the global market [6]. Given that the Philippines is one of the largest English-speaking countries, the high demand for online English teachers from the country can be attributed to the Filipino's degree of fluency in the English language [7], standard American pronunciation [8], and high rate of literacy in information technology, trainability, natural warmth, customer care orientation, and a strong affinity to Western culture [9]. Hence, it has resulted in positioning the Philippines as a reputable education center for English language learners [10].

Aside from proficiency in the language, as one of the strengths of the Philippines that has helped drive the economy, the influx of foreign learners of English is also on the rise due to the relatively more affordable but quality English as a Second Language (ESL) programs being offered locally [7]. In the year 2020, there are about 10 million registered students and more than 20,000 partner teachers in the Philippines [8].

In the Philippines, most of the ESL teachers were college graduates who once worked part-time and later decided to pursue this as their full-time job after graduation [11]. Others who did not make it to land a job in their preferred field choose to teach English online as an alternative [12]. Even though most of them do not have formal training in online ESL teaching back in college, their ability to converse in English leads them to get hired [12].

There are very few studies conducted regarding the lived experiences of Filipino online ESL teachers. Those already existing studies are derived from empirical findings involving ESL teachers in a face-to-face setting. Thus, there is a need to gather empirical evidence to explore the nature of the demand for online ESL Filipino teachers. This is relevant to when Renee Marie Reyes, the then Chief of the ESL Market Development Group under the

Philippines' Department of Tourism (DOT), pointed out that with the demand for Filipino online English teachers, there is a need to maintain the Philippines' strength as a major ESL destination [7]. Hence, in this paper, the objective of the study is as follows: Generally, to explore the lived experiences of online ESL (English as Second Language) Filipino teachers through a phenomenological inquiry; and, specifically, to narrate the ESL teachers' experiences that motivated them to teach, the challenges they encountered and ways to overcome them, their teaching strategies, and the benefits gained from their career.

METHODOLOGY

The Transcendental phenomenology (TPh) by Husserl was used to carefully analyze the lived experiences of the participants. A phenomenological approach is a qualitative research technique that focuses on the commonality of the lived experience of a group of people. This approach's main objective is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon [13]. TPh follows a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology, seeking to understand human experience [14]. Pure TPh is founded on and conditioned by the concept of discarding all preconceived notions about a particular phenomenon by exploring further what needs to be uncovered about the genuine meaning of a certain phenomenon [14]. Through this approach, the researcher was able to understand and capture the points of view of his research participants, which resulted in a wealth of detailed information; therefore, leading to an increase in the depth of understanding of the subject of inquiry.

The research participants were selected utilizing a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a technique that involves the researcher's consideration of the participant's experience in the information required for the study [15]. The participants of this research were the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English graduates of a state university in the Philippines, and have been working as online English teachers for at least three years in an ESL company, regardless of whether they are home-based or office-based. In identifying the participants, an announcement for a call for research participants on a social media platform was made. A total of seven (7) participants responded and willingly participated in the conduct of the research. All their names in this research were withheld, and alias names were used to hide their identity. Due to the current pandemic situation when the data gathering was conducted, the researchers utilized an alternative mode of interview by utilizing technology-mediated communication through online interviews. Online interviews are used for primary internet-mediated research (IMR); that is, they are used to gather original data via the Internet to subject them to analysis to provide new evidence to a specific research question [16]. Scholarly online interviews are conducted following ethical research guidelines, in which, verifiable research participants provided with informed consent before participating in the interview.

Unstructured interviews, both in the initial and follow-up interviews, were utilized. The seven (7) participants were interviewed separately depending on their available time. When the data were finalized, the narratives were audio-recorded and then transcribed to ensure that participants' exact phrasing, emphasis, hesitations, emotions, etc., were captured. The researcher generally took brief notes during the interview and recorded more detailed impressions [17]. The initial interpretation of the results was presented to the participants for their verification. Then, another round of interviews was conducted to gather another relevant information from the participants. Again, the availability of the participants was considered. The narratives were coded in the original language following the stages of reading and re-reading of the transcribed narratives obtained from the interviews [18], [19], [20].

Guided by the tenets observed by Creswell J.W. and Creswell J. D. [13], the researcher, during data collection, did not marginalize the participants but respected their reservations. As part of the data-gathering protocol, the researcher first sought consent from the research participants. Consent is a mechanism to ensure that the participants understand the purpose of participating in the research study and decide on their answers to the questions deliberately [17].

RESULTS

Based on the shared narratives of the ESL teachers, the following themes of the lived experiences of the teachers emerged: Motivational Factors, Teaching Approaches, Challenges Encountered, Overcoming Challenges, Significant Contributions, and Qualities of Filipinos as Preferred ESL Teachers.

A. Motivational Factors

Passion to teach. The participants revealed that the more they were exposed to teaching ESL students, the more they felt their essence as a teacher whenever they saw their students learning from them. This is evident in Teacher Thea's experience when she was assigned to teach young Japanese students. She shared: "There's so much joy in my heart whenever I see my students learning English because my students are Japanese." Similarly, Teacher Beconia said, "It is motivating to see young foreign learners developing their skills."

While Teacher Joan was preparing for her licensure examination for teachers and at the same time teaching ESL, she found enjoyment in doing her job. She shared: "It was also a good time for me to prepare for the licensure examination. While teaching at an ESL company, I enjoyed it because I met a lot of friendly students."

Teacher Jene was hesitant to teach in school because she was not confident that she could handle actual classes. Despite being half-hearted about teaching, she found the motivation to teach again when she started ESL teaching. She emphasized: "Although I was hesitant about applying for a job in an academic school, I still wanted to teach. It is my first and greatest love. It's actually what makes me love this job." Like her is Teacher Faith, who shared: "I am a shy type of person that would love teaching without interacting with students physically."

A great deal of convenience. ESL teachers are well aware of the number of workloads that school teachers have to prepare before the lesson, such as lesson plans, instructional materials, and activities, among others. But it is different in ESL teaching, where a ready-made instructional material is already available for execution, which provides them with a "great deal of convenience."

Teacher Jene shared, "I took the job permanently because it offers me a great deal of convenience. I can fulfill my church affiliation duties." She added, "I can work with less pressure and stress." Teacher Beconia also has obligations as a mother and as a wife, in which she said that if she were working as a school teacher, she will be having a hard time managing her time preparing the lecturer's paraphernalia every day. She said, "I also practiced my profession and learned how to balance being a teacher, a mother, and a wife."

Despite this, the ESL teachers revealed that even though there is a great deal of convenience in their work, this does not mean that being an ESL teacher is an easy job. According to Teacher Jene, "In everything that we do, we have to exert effort to achieve a good outcome." Although ESL teaching is less hassle and pressure, it doesn't guarantee that they will not feel exhausted and burdened. Teacher Jene stated, "It's a case-to-case basis, especially for someone who takes the teaching profession seriously and passionately."

Competitive salary. All of the research participants initially tried to teach in ESL when they had no option to apply for a job in school, but since they liked to teach, they tried applying to an ESL company. They were convinced to teach ESL because of the competitive salary.

These are evident in the following shared experiences of the ESL teachers: Teacher JC stated, "This company assures that all employees can have work-life balance and be fairly compensated." Teacher Dan shared, "Aside from the compensation, the fulfillment. You are not just imparting knowledge, you are making friends with other nationalities." Teacher Faith mentioned that there is a big difference in the salary that a private school teacher receives as compared to working as an ESL teacher. She said, "It [the salary] is quite competitive compared to teaching in a private school." Teacher Jene also considered working at her own pace while being able to provide for the needs of her family. She revealed that "I could support my family financially as I work at my own pace." It can be implied from the shared experiences of the ESL teachers that initially they are being practical by taking the opportunity to teach ESL. More than a great deal of convenience, they are well compensated for their work with the necessary benefits. Most of the private schools they know, according to the participants, only compensate the teachers at a rate that is less than half of what they are earning as ESL teachers.

Client's positive feedback. Another motivation that keeps the ESL teachers in their job is the **positive feedback** they receive from the parents of the kids they are handling and the gratitude shared by their adult learners. One closer statement is Teacher Thea's insight: "When parents are thanking me at the end of every session and enrolling in my class again, it makes me more motivated to do this job."

Further, Teacher Thea shared, "Knowing that parents are sending you messages, thanking you for everything you've done for their children, you are also making a huge impact on their lives. They will never forget that you are their teacher." Teacher Joan added that the feedback that her students want to learn from her drives her motivation further. She said, "This type of work is challenging, but the eagerness of the students to learn will encourage you to give more."

Career enhancements. The participants consider their experience at the ESL company as part of their career enhancements. This provides them more motivation to stay in their current job. The actual training and the teaching experience per se that they are receiving from the company is an opportunity for them to learn how to deal with learners with varied group profiles according to their nationalities, age, culture, religion, sex, etc. Teacher JC claimed, "They also provide timely coaching and training sessions that would help teachers improve themselves and expand their skills. These are some things that push me to pursue this career." It can be implied from the statement of Teacher Joan that she is seeking a different venue for a teaching experience that will enhance her teaching skills as revealed in her statement, "Since I was a fresh graduate at that time, I would like to at least have a little pause at teaching in a school and would like to try something else but still a little like teaching."

B. Teaching Approaches

The teacher is a classroom facilitator. The research participants shared that their learners should be guided instinctively when delivering lessons because most of them have "zero knowledge" of English. For this reason, their teaching style is primarily teacher-centered, because, according to them, the content should be delivered directly to the students, given the limited time. Teacher Thea shared, "It is more of a teacher-centered approach since English is just their second language, and most of them are not yet familiar with it. They are only focusing on their teachers, listening to whatever their teachers teach them." Teacher Beconia added, "Then while teaching the lesson, I let my students speak if they have ideas about certain topics. Then, I let them listen first and ask for some clarification."

Oftentimes, they are given 15 minutes of interaction to deliver their lessons. So, they need to maximize their allowable time to execute their lessons. The ESL teachers said that there are learners who have 'zero knowledge'

of English, and learning the language cannot be learned in an instant. Teacher Thea explained, "Based on our company's policy, you must not exceed 15 minutes because the classroom itself will close automatically." She further stated that for beginners, the amount given is insufficient. "Though lesson plans are tested for a 15-minute dry run, when you have a student who is eager to learn, 15 minutes is just a blink of an eye," Teacher Thea added. So, they need to strategize in facilitating their lessons.

Along with well-designed and communicated rules and procedures, the ESL teachers acknowledge students' behavior, reinforcing acceptable behavior and providing negative consequences for unacceptable behavior. For instance, reminding the students of the set classroom rules is one of the ways used by Teacher Beconia to establish her authority in the class and to condition the students right away to take the lessons seriously. She shared, "I set rules to be followed before the class started. In the first phase of the lesson, I let my students do some fun and engaging short activities or games for the warm-up. I am making sure that my class will be fun and fruitful."

ESL teachers emphasize the importance of being enthusiastic while using an appropriate tone of voice, speaking clearly and deliberately in a pitch that is slightly but not greatly elevated from normal classroom speech. Teacher Jene's style is, in the initial part of the lecture, she said, "I would start my class with high-energy greetings." Teacher Faith uses some energizers to begin the lesson. According to her, "This is the perfect time to catch the student's attention by letting them do something that will put their attention in the class, and at the same time, they will have fun." Among the shared energizers that Teacher Faith uses are "singing, dancing, or tongue twisters."

Rapport building. The activities previously shared by the ESL teachers can help them build rapport with their learners. Building rapport is relevant to the teaching-learning process. To encourage the learners to speak, even at the start of the class, the ESL teachers use common expressions.

The expressions vary depending on the different types of learners. Teacher Joan shared, "If it is a beginner class, questions like '**how are you today**' and '**what did you do today**' are the most common but effective expressions to make them talk in the class." She added that "If it is an intermediate class, expressions like '**what do you think of the weather today**' and the like engage them to speak in sentences." These simple expressions allow the learners to speak and break the barrier between the teacher and the student, which results in building a rapport. Once they have established rapport, they will proceed to free talk for about five to ten minutes, which the ESL teacher does for most of their classes to practice their conversational English. Then, they will proceed to the main lectures, which are often based on the teaching materials provided by the company.

C. Challenges Encountered

Student's behavior. Students can engage in problematic behaviors because of personal or family problems, adjustment or developmental issues (e.g., "immaturity" or self-esteem issues), or general academic difficulties. These factors are not controllable, so ESL teachers did not ignore these issues but provided necessary interventions to overcome them.

According to Teacher Thea, her learners are at the stage where it is difficult for them to pay attention because of the various distractions surrounding them, like their gadgets and their playmates, among others. She shared, "Some of the students are distracted. There are times when they are playing when you teach them." Teacher Jene also encountered rude students. According to her, these are "super hyper students who can't sit still for five minutes." She needs to remain composed in delivering her lessons because, as she said, "I am being observed regularly by parents who can't leave their children behind even though they're at home." Teacher Jene said just like any other teacher, she maintains her composure when she encounters the same scenario. "I try to be more patient and understanding," she explained.

For some ESL teachers, it is important to involve parents in the learning of their children, not otherwise. Teacher Jene encourages parents to be involved in the learning process to manage the students' behavior. She added, "I always see to it that I greet and engage the parents during the class if they are observing so they can also interact with their children since most of them love to coach their kids during the class." Teacher Thea also did the same approach, but in moderation. She explained, "I also make learning fun for them so that they won't get scared of the teacher and the language. I also involve parents when I teach them, but not all the time." However, Teacher Jene said some of her learners cry "when they cannot repeat the words or answer some questions" because they were scolded by their parents.

Customer is always right. The company is always on the side of its clients whenever there are complaints from the clients. If there are complaints about the misbehavior of the learners, the company will blame it on the teacher's fault. According to Teacher Faith, "They will always say it's the teacher's factor, when in fact it's not even the teacher who should be blamed for the student's misconduct."

The ESL teachers shared that most of their beginner students are accompanied by their parents. They sometimes express their dissatisfaction with the ESL teacher's approach to teaching. When it happens, Teacher Joan shared, "They will send a complaint to the management and ask to change their children's teacher."

Teacher Beconia mentioned that some unsatisfied parents preferred a certain personality of a teacher. She said, "There are some students and parents who like to have an energetic and fun teacher, but some do not, and it is vice versa. I should be flexible and aware of my students' background, culture, and behavior."

Teacher Joan experienced that during her class, her students cancelled her schedule when they did not feel the presence of their teacher. "They want a friendly aura from the teacher. If they feel like you're too sassy, or more

like vulgar, or a teacher who doesn't smile at all times during the class, they will cancel their scheduled class with you," she said.

Teacher Joan narrated that there are adult learners who are particular about the delivery of the lessons. She said, "It could also happen if you have a sensitive or meticulous senior student." Teacher Faith exclaimed, "Regardless of what the situation is, the company usually doesn't give fair consideration when there's a complaint."

The usual complaints they are receiving are about the effectiveness of the delivery of the lesson. They sometimes learn from the customer's feedback that it seems like their children are not learning.

Sharing of confidential information. Teacher Beconia and Teacher Dan encountered some clients, usually adult learners, who would ask questions that were prohibited by their company. This includes the teacher's personal information and the overall operation of the company, like "when they insist on asking and knowing about something that is prohibited by the company and the platform itself," Teacher Dan said. Even though they are prohibited from sharing confidential information, they are trained on how to explain to their clients the policy that will not offend them.

Even though the teachers are aware of the political affairs of each country, they are not allowed to share or begin a discussion about politics with their students. For example, Teacher Dan shared her encounters with her student, who talked about the special regions of China like "Hong Kong, Tibet, and Macao." To prevent her learners from talking about the political affairs involving these special regions and Mainland China, she diverted the discussion to what they liked about the places mentioned. Teacher Dan said that they needed to direct the topic back to teaching the learners about the grammar lesson. "According to our company policy, as long as the focus is not on the political opinions, it is okay. We have to listen to our students, correct the Grammar, then proceed," Teacher Dan explained.

Language and Cultural Barrier. It is common among ESL teachers to handle 'zero English learners' who cannot speak or understand English words. Teacher Joan mentioned that they classify this type of learner as "beginner students." She said, "Beginning students can be a 5-year-old student, a 12-year-old student, or a 40-year-old student." Since they have difficulty explaining lessons to their beginner students, they strategize to have a list of phrases that are translated into the learner's first language. Teacher Joan shared, "If a 'zero English' student is a 5-year-old student, you are allowed to talk in their native language to not waste time explaining what to do because no matter how you explain, he/she will just stare at you, or just say yes or no, or just copy what you say." However, if she is handling adults with "zero English," she tries to explain the lesson using basic English, which is accompanied by photos to help with conversation. She chooses this teaching approach because, according to her, "This technique [translation of English to the learner's native language] is not possible with a 40-year-old student because they might be offended, so the teacher should bring his/her 'word pool' to converse with. Or a picture of a thing can be a great help. You Google search the thing you're talking about and then drag it on the platform. But too much use of it is not allowed."

Teacher Dan has also encountered the same problem when handling 'zero English' students. She shared, "One of the challenges I think would be handling level 0 learners. There's always a language barrier, and that's the most difficult part." To handle this, Teacher Dan said, "I handle it by using an online translator. Although translators are not accurate, it helps a lot."

ESL teachers narrated that they were extra careful of their students who came from Japan, China, and Korea because they are culture-sensitive. So, whenever they are giving examples, they make sure that they are culture-appropriate. Teacher Dan shared, "If the topics are not culturally-appropriate for them but they are in the book, in that case, we have to ask them if it's okay to talk about them, or we will use another example."

D. Overcoming Challenges

ESL teachers' adaptability. Adaptability is the capacity to adjust one's thoughts and behaviors to effectively respond to uncertainty, new information, or changed circumstances. It encompasses cognitive, behavioral, and emotional adjustments.

Teacher JC explained, "We cater to different students, which means our students can be a child, a CEO, a doctor, a housewife, a job seeker, and so much more." It is for this reason that there is a need for ESL teachers to be adaptable to situations in the practice of their profession. For Teacher Thea, adaptability is likened to being more prepared for whatever the situation is. She said, "We should always try to come to class prepared and armed like a soldier going on the battlefield. We have to be equipped physically, emotionally, and mentally." Teacher JC pointed out the importance of assessing the students to be adaptable to the situation. He said, "I assess my students. I try to learn their weaknesses and strengths because, through this, I can know what strategy or method will suit them." Relative to this, Teacher Joan maintained a friendly and approachable aura to help her students be less shy in class. This is her considered, generic, adaptable way of engaging her students in the classroom. "One thing that helped me was to smile at the students. Foreign students are very shy and, as their teacher, I should start a safe and friendly environment," she explained.

The ESL teachers revealed that they encounter a diverse range of learners to whom they must respond appropriately. In some instances, even though they are online, they face unexpected situations in the online class or shifts in the timetable that they need to navigate. Another one is how they integrate new and changing knowledge from professional learning into their teaching practices. All of these situations require teachers to adapt to successfully navigate them. Adapting may involve adjusting lesson pacing to better engage students,

minimizing frustration when a lesson is not going according to plan, or adapting one's approach to collaboration to work well based on the narratives of the ESL teachers.

Flexibility in teaching and learning. The ESL companies are aware that most of their clients come from different backgrounds. Based on the experiences of ESL teachers, they are trained on how to handle different types of learners; thus, they say that there is “no fixed approach” to all learners. As ESL teachers, they have to be flexible in handling these learners. Although there are common practices in terms of classroom management, they need to adjust should needs arise.

These are evident in the following responses: Teacher JC shared, “Unlike other ESL teachers, I don't do video classes. I teach through phone calls, and we cater to different kinds of students.” Teacher Joan mentioned, “Actually, while I was in my training period, the management taught [us] how to facilitate each type of class. That should be the basic class facilitation.” More so, Teacher Jene said, “There are no specific approaches; I just followed and adapted some practices from my former senior colleague.”

The materials to be used by the ESL teacher vary depending on the “ESL level, age, and areas of specification in which the students want to give focus,” according to Teacher Jene. For example, she has a student who is an elementary student. The level she wants is **B1, or high-intermediate level**, which is more advanced than her current elementary level. The competency that the students want to focus on is speaking. In some instances, she encountered students who were already adults but requested a beginning lesson in ESL. In this situation, she will be using learning materials that are used for beginning learners, but with activities such as “reading, vocabulary and sentence drills, and comprehension check-ups” that are suitable for the age of the learner.

Teacher Jene explained, “If the student is a beginner and an adult, I would first select books that are not too childlike and let my student decide on these selections. Then we will proceed accordingly with the vocabulary, phonic, and grammatical foundations.” This is in the same way as the explanation of Teacher Faith that “Activities will vary according to the student's level of understanding.” Teacher JC emphasized that by using different approaches, it is necessary to consider the background of their learners. “These students require different approaches. We need to be flexible and adjust based on their age, level, profession, attitude, and preference,” he added.

Hence, it is important for ESL teachers that, as they are adjusting to the learning needs of their learners, the learners must be able to absorb the practical applications of what they are teaching them. As Teacher Faith stated, “You have to do a quick review of the lesson and ask if the student has a question. This is the part where the student will practice the learned expression, and they have to use it in real-life situations.” Another technique that shows the teaching flexibility of ESL teachers is being prepared with supplementary materials in case their students are having difficulty understanding the lesson. Teacher Jene presented an example. She said, “I occasionally add some interactive games through online ESL websites and some self-made presentations. I believe these help students to be motivated and interactive.”

Part of the adjustments being considered by the ESL teachers is the use of appropriate language. According to Teacher Dan, “As much as possible, I'm using words that are easier to understand since most of the students are beginners.” She explained that most of their learners come from non-English-speaking countries, which is why ESL teachers must adjust to a language that they can easily understand.

E. Significant Contribution

Personal development. On a personal level, ESL teachers are personally rewarded for their experience as ESL teachers. For them, this is a rewarding job, for it gives them pride to help a zero-English student. Teacher Thea emphasized this, “Being an ESL teacher is a rewarding job for me. Teaching non-native children to read, write, and speak English is a great achievement. Whenever they can speak English, it puts a smile on their faces, and it melts my heart.”

For Teacher JC, aside from the financial needs he is obtaining from being an ESL teacher, his exposure to this field has increased his self-confidence to speak English. He said, “Personally, this job helps me to provide for my needs and our family's expenses. This profession boosts my confidence, especially in terms of using the English language.” This is the same experience as Teacher Joan and Teacher Beconia, who admitted that they were “shy” and “quiet” students back in college. But when they started teaching ESL, it forced them to overcome their shy personality. Teacher Joan said, “I was known to be a shy and quiet student when I was in college. When I started ESL teaching, especially in my free-talking classes, I had to think of something to talk about.” Similarly, Teacher Beconia mentioned, “I did the thing I thought I couldn't. I gained more confidence in teaching English.” Part of this sense of fulfillment is the happiness the ESL teachers are getting from their job. Teacher Beconia revealed, “You'll enjoy the teaching and learning process. And the best thing is, you are learning while you are teaching.”

Additionally, they have also improved their empathy and sympathy towards their students. Teacher Jene mentioned, “I learned how to adjust to and confront conflicts. I was able to show empathy to a considerable degree.” For Teacher Faith, she learned to be patient with her students. She said, “Teaching online has become a big help for me to gain more patience.” Similarly, Teacher Dan gained the same thing. She said, “I develop patience and understanding.” She explained, “Teaching ESL, you have to understand that students have diverse cultures, learning styles, and attitudes towards learning. We have this 'fake it till you make it' attitude towards students with bad behavior.”

Social development. Part of establishing a good relationship with others is knowing their background. According to ESL teachers, learning the culture of their students made them more aware of how they should socially engage their learners while delivering the lessons. As a fundamental feature of social life, social interaction by being culturally aware of their students helps them understand how to act and react to their students. This is common among the responses of ESL teachers.

Teacher Thea said, "I get to know the behavior of my students because of the culture of Japan. I also gain respect from them, I have effective communication with my students and their parents." Teacher Joan, who is teaching Korean students, shared, "ESL teaching is also learning more about my students' culture. I have learned a lot about Korean culture—the way they think and the way they live." For Teacher Jene, her social communication improved a lot when she started working as an ESL teacher. She narrated, "Since I got involved in ESL teaching, this has helped me enhance my social communication skills not only in the field of online teaching but also in our church worship services."

Another fulfillment of ESL teachers' jobs is the chance to get to know more about their learners. Even though they are not closely related, they feel that they have already established a good relationship with their students.

Being exposed to a different teaching environment with diverse types of learners, Teacher Joan shared, "I received their [her adult learners'] self-experienced advice." She said that she sometimes received unsolicited advice from some of her adult learners about life lessons, about continuing to pursue her dreams to become successful. She seemed to her that she had found a confidant when she stated, "I found another mother." She also mentioned that this significant encounter from learning from her students is a pleasurable experience. She said, "There will be awkward class sessions, but there will also be pleasurable ones." Teacher Beconia also shared, "Aside from our students learning from us, sometimes we are also learning from them, especially when they share personal stories with us." For some of her learners, Teacher Joan shared, "It opens opportunities for new friendships." Also, for Teacher Dan, she said, "What I like the most is that I was able to build a good relationship with different nationalities, and I can say that they are not just students, they're friends."

However, Teacher Thea said that they should not become too emotionally attached to their students because, after they are done with their purpose, they have to cut down on their ties to them. She shared, "I'm like Nanny McPhee that bids goodbye when I'm no longer needed."

Professional development. On a professional level, ESL teachers obtain relevant teaching skills from their job as ESL teachers. They affirmed that among those attainments of their professional goals are as follows: learning new abilities, earning certifications, gaining more experience in a specific field, and pursuing any other career aspirations.

Teacher Thea shared, "I get to gain new skills and work experience. I learned to deal with different kinds of students one at a time. I also learned how to engage everyone to learn the English language." Teacher JC is grateful for obtaining the TOEFL certificate. He said, "I am also grateful that ESL teachers in this company had a chance to obtain a TOEFL certificate. It helps me to be more equipped and credible." Teacher Joan mentioned that, "ESL teaching also widened my vocabulary." Most of her students need to converse in basic English, and she has to learn that basic English. She explained, "I should have a lot of words to share in the class. I should read more to teach the language in a confident and informative manner."

Their teaching skills are nurtured because of the nature of the teaching experience they have as ESL teachers. Teacher Jene shared that being an ESL teacher makes her feel like she has become a real teacher. She said, "It [being an ESL teacher] makes me believe that I am a real teacher." Teacher Jene acknowledges that her exposure to the ESL teaching environment helped her "to learn a lot of new approaches and disciplines that will make my classes more exciting and interesting." Similarly, Teacher Beconia also learned new strategies for teaching ESL. She said, "I learned a lot of teaching styles and techniques from my students as well as from my co-workers."

For Teacher Faith, she admitted that before she easily became angry at those students who were not behaving properly, but her ESL teaching experience taught her to manage her emotions when dealing with misbehaving students. Teacher Faith shared, "ESL teaching taught me that being angry at a student's misbehavior will not help them to be good or do the right thing." She believes that students should not be forced to learn; they should enjoy learning.

Filipino ESL teachers are fulfilled with their job when they serve as a bridge in helping their learners to learn the English language. Based on their shared experiences, they consider that seeing their students' learning serves as fulfillment of their job as ESL teachers.

Teacher Thea shared, "Japanese are scared when it comes to learning English. I am glad that I became their bridge so that they can learn a new language." Teacher Jene said, "As an ESL teacher, you don't just teach, you learn, and somehow shape the lives of those people you meet in your classes." Also, on a more personal level, Teacher Jene felt fulfilled in her current job because it changed her "behavior and way of thinking" about her mission as a teacher aiming for a better education. She further elaborated, "It doesn't matter whether it is in the classroom or via virtual platforms, because learning is everywhere as long as there are people who are willing to teach and learn."

Teacher Beconia also shared the same thoughts. "It is so much more fulfilling, especially when you see that your student is progressing from being unknowledgeable to a better one," she said. Another shared narrative is from

Teacher Joan: "I have created a bond with them. I became the person to share their stories with. I made them speak their first English sentence."

According to Teacher Beconia, "Witnessing your student's development will give you satisfaction in your teaching career." Similarly, Teacher Thea also felt the same satisfaction from teaching her students. She shared, "I get satisfied whenever I hear my student speak the language fluently without any help from me." Teacher Faith also shared the same thought, "When my students express their gratitude and thankfulness to all of my efforts and dedication in helping them."

It has been the mission of Teacher JC to help others with English. So, from his current job as an ESL teacher, he said, "English has been my favorite subject ever since I entered high school, and now that I have the chance to share my knowledge with my foreign students, I must say that this profession is worth fulfilling."

F. Qualities of Filipinos as Preferred ESL Teachers

Friendly. Based on the narratives of the ESL teachers, they are receiving praise from their clients for being friendly, as shown in their clients' reviews. ESL learners preferred the Filipino's fun personality over a strict teacher. Teacher Beconia mentioned that most of her clients want "energetic and fun teachers." This is also similar to the observation of Teacher Joan, who shared, "Maybe it is because Filipino ESL teachers are friendly. We have a genuine smile." ESL learners do not want to feel intimidated by their teachers, and the ESL teachers are aware of this. For this reason, they are maintaining their friendly personality to encourage their students to speak.

Patient. The ESL teachers also learned from the comments of their clients that the ESL Filipino teachers are patient in handling students who have zero knowledge of English. Filipino teachers are finding ways to strategize to help their learners learn the language in a way that will not be a burden to them. Teacher Joan stated that "Filipino teachers are also patient. Some students have zero English in words and accent." Thus, she added, "In that case, a lot of patience from the teacher is a requirement." Both Teacher Jene and Teacher Faith have seen the importance of being patient to understand their students better and deliver their lessons well.

Relatable. Most of the non-English-speaking countries come from Asia. This relative proximity of these nations to the Philippines develops a sense of relatability because the shared culture and practices are somehow similar to the country. The ESL teachers explained that these learners feel comfortable talking with their fellow Asians. Unlike when they are talking to native English speakers, they feel intimidated. For instance, Teacher Thea said, "Because we come from the same region, they are not shy about talking to us, unlike other ESL teachers who speak English as their native language."

The ESL learners who come from non-English-speaking countries could relate to Filipinos because Filipinos, too, in general, are non-English speakers, but only learn the language because it is the medium of instruction in school. This relatability, according to Teacher Dan, is one of the attributes that ESL learners like about Filipino teachers. She explained, "Maybe it's because Filipino teachers can relate to them since English is not our native language." Then she added another advantage of having a Filipino ESL teacher, "Filipino teachers can give them advice on how to learn the language easily."

English language skills. Teacher Joan narrated that, based on her previous students, they like Filipinos' English speaking skills and accents because it is "more understandable" for them. Teacher Dan shared that the Filipino teachers "have clear pronunciation and their speaking pace is not too fast." Teacher Joan added that Filipinos are "careful in using the right terms in conversing," too. She also mentioned that their ESL learners complain about talking to native English speakers because "they feel like they're too fluent and hard to understand." This is also the observation of Teacher Dan that ESL learners prefer Filipino teachers because "Filipinos can understand them better." This implies that Filipinos can comprehend the accent used by their learners since most of their students have unique English sounds that sometimes are difficult to understand. Since Filipinos are patient with their learners, they extend as much patience as possible to understand what their learners are saying.

DISCUSSION

This study primarily contributed to explaining how ESL Filipino teachers became in-demand teachers across the globe. The findings presented some strategies that ESL Filipino teachers do for them to be considered by their learners. Significant findings show that the research confirms that the online ESL Filipino teachers' unique way of teaching, by incorporating their genuine personality, has been apparent in the overall results.

As revealed in the study, the formulated aspects such as motivational factors, teaching approaches, challenges encountered, and Filipinos as preferred ESL teachers point to the ESL experience of online English teachers, indicating the contributing factors that mold ESL teachers in how they have become online English teachers.

ESL teachers find a great deal of convenience while enjoying a good salary from their job. Teacher motivation refers to reasons emanating from individuals' intrinsic values to choose to teach and sustain teaching, and the intensity of teacher motivation is indicated by the effort expended on teaching as influenced by several contextual factors [21].

The narratives of the teachers revealed that their experience as ESL teachers motivated them to be more passionate about teaching, but the competition in hiring for a job at a school, despite its high demand, does not equate to the number of graduates, which left most of them looking for an alternative job related to teaching. Initially, the only

things that motivate ESL teachers to pursue ESL teaching are the competitive salary, but things have changed as they become more exposed to ESL teaching.

Considering that ESL teachers are handling one-on-one students at a particular time and following a standardized curriculum for execution, they find ESL teaching beneficiary in maintaining their work-life balance, which favors them to be more motivated.

ESL teaching follows a standardized curriculum designed for its target learners. It is for this reason that ESL teachers become flexible with various types of learners as part of their classroom management. The quality of teacher-student relationships is the keystone for all other aspects of classroom management [22], which involves the practical application and integration of much of the foundational knowledge [23]. Hence, their experience as ESL teachers develops them a wide variety of skills and techniques that keep students organized, orderly, focused, attentive, on task, and academically productive during a class.

As shown from the analysis, teacher-centeredness is often utilized by online ESL Filipino teachers because most of their learners are beginning learners who are required to be spoon-fed, which is helpful to the learners to absorb the lessons easily. With so many factors affecting the learning process, students experience difficulties when it comes to certain skills, such as reading, writing, and speaking. Online ESL Filipino teachers made efforts that could benefit students who do not speak English. In effect, with this reality among ESL learners, it remains necessary for ESL teachers to encourage their learners to express their ideas. That is why building rapport is very important in the teacher-student relationship in ESL teaching while maintaining appropriate levels of dominance, exhibiting appropriate levels of cooperation, and being aware of high-needs students [24].

ESL teachers encountered problems with their clients. Commonly, these clients are meticulous about teaching approaches. Some are sensitive when they are being corrected by their teachers. Although ESL teachers are trained to be flexible teachers, shifting from one learner to another with varying levels of need is commonly a challenge for them. They also encountered problems with their customers who were asking for confidential information or even sharing political views. They are trained professionally to prevent the clients from initiating these prohibited discussions. Coming from different cultures, ESL teachers often encounter problems in conversing with their learners, and sometimes they are not aware of the cultural background of their learners. Concerning culture-appropriateness, the ESL teachers affirmed that language barriers and cultural understanding hinder them in the delivery of their lessons.

Although the ESL teachers are both financially and professionally benefiting from their job, they admitted that there are internal concerns within the company policy that they cannot avoid. The ESL teachers complained about the unfair treatment sometimes received by their company because they are always siding with their clients.

Students living in their home countries, where English is not the first or official language, face a major learning journey that can take more than five years to complete [25]. As Asian countries like Japan, China, and Korea regard English as a foreign language, problems arise when students from these countries try to learn the English language with difficulty [26]. This has similar concerns when teaching English among Arabic speakers since their L1 and L2 differ in their language systems about grammar, leading many studies to conclude that Arab learners' errors are attributed to the interference from the first language [27].

Teaching English as a Second Language gives ESL teachers ample opportunities to be creative and experimental with different activities and projects so that their students will enjoy their classes. For instance, the most rewarding moments have always been the ones when they take the risk of improvising. They always have a Plan B or C in case there is a need for them to "improvise". This strategy was found to be effective in a study about the effects of literary discourse to improve the writing skills of ESL learners [28].

The Philippines' good reputation as a second language speaker and the good personality of the teachers are factors the clients considered for choosing ESL Filipino teachers [29]. This is apparent in the current findings of the study, where the Filipino online ESL teachers attributed their experience as ESL teachers to boosting their confidence, improving their language proficiency, improving their communication skills, gaining more patience, and developing empathy. Their experience also provides them with an appreciation of others' cultures and the ability to get along with other nationalities. Professionally, it equips them with relevant teaching experience, provides an opportunity for work-life balance, and provides an opportunity for professional growth.

It can further be gleaned from the findings of the study that it is already given that the fulfilment of a teacher is seeing their students learn from them. But based on the other findings, the ESL teachers consider that they have also fulfilled their mission in life to help those who are not capable of learning the English language. It gives them the chance to establish a good relationship with their learners. Yet, this experience is a difficult part on their end as they have to bid farewell when their purpose is done, since they are prohibited from getting the personal contact information of their students.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main reasons given by ESL Filipino teachers for pursuing their job are the salary and the lack of an option to teach in high school. This later changed when they realized the value of this job. The ESL Filipino teachers who participated in this study revealed that they felt the fulfillment in performing their mission as ESL teachers, even though it is far from what they aspired to back when they were studying in college. They mentioned that their

careers might change in the future, but they will acknowledge how their ESL experience has prepared them to become efficient and effective teachers. ESL teaching provides them opportunity for personal and professional growth. Specifically, it enhances their knowledge about pedagogical approaches and prepares them to handle learners from different culture.

With the demand for ESL teaching and the benefits it can give to its graduates, it is imperative to recommend educational institutions for training sessions to capacitate those who are interested in pursuing this career. Higher education institutions as potential human resources for potential ESL teachers may begin by forging a tie-up with existing ESL companies with a reputable standing, who will outsource potential ESL teachers from the educational institutions. Further study on the impact of ESL teaching as a career may be conducted by future researchers to further consolidate or validate the current findings of the study.

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