

Walking with Bound Feet: Lived Experiences of Filipino Secondary English Teachers in Papua New Guinea

Annalyn O. Esperanza

The Philippine Women's University, Graduate School of Education Manila, Philippines
20113063@pwu.edu.ph

Alvin S. Sicat

The Philippine Women's University, Graduate School of Education Manila, Philippines
Co-author
assicat@pwu.edu.ph

Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of seven Filipino secondary English teachers in Papua New Guinea using a descriptive-phenomenological approach. Seven (7) purposively selected participants were interviewed through semi-structured interviews, and the data were thematically analyzed, resulting in five key themes: motivations for pursuing a teaching career in Papua New Guinea, comparisons of English teaching experiences in the Philippines and Papua New Guinea, descriptions of the PNG English language curriculum, effective pedagogical strategies for PNG students, and challenges encountered by Filipino secondary English teachers in the country. The participants navigated these challenges by employing differentiated, interactive, and context-based teaching methods while fostering cultural empathy and resilience. Notably, gender-based power imbalances, rooted in cultural norms, persist within educational institutions, affecting teachers' experiences. In response to these findings, the ENCORE+5S Framework was developed as a practical guide to enhance English instruction in Papua New Guinea by integrating contextualized resources, differentiated and skills-based teaching, and the effective use of technology and professional development. Limitations of the study include its focus solely on Filipino secondary English teachers; therefore, future studies should involve diverse nationalities to enrich comparative perspectives and strengthen the applicability of findings across similar multicultural educational settings.

Keywords: *Filipino secondary English teachers, Papua New Guinea, ENCORE+ 5S Framework, cultural empathy*

Bio-profile

Annalyn O. Esperanza is an educator and academic leader with more than 20 years of teaching Language and Literature in Secondary Schools in Papua New Guinea. She has recently been appointed as the Principal of Mt. Fubilan International School, an emerging educational institution in Tabubil, Western Province, Papua New Guinea, where she will lead the establishment of the school's academic and organizational systems with a strong emphasis on literacy and educational excellence.

Prior to her appointment, Ms. Esperanza served for many years as the Head of the English Department at Daru Secondary School and Tabubil Secondary School, two government secondary schools in Western Province, Papua New Guinea. A passionate advocate of reading,



she also served as Teacher-in-Charge of the school library, leading initiatives that promoted a culture of reading and strengthened literacy among students.

Introduction

“Ut est omnium magister usus—Experience is the teacher of all things.” – Julius Caesar

Every experience narrates a tale, and teaching is no exception. Beyond theoretical knowledge, the profession is shaped and refined through lived experiences. Julius Caesar’s quote captures the essence of this study, which gives voice to the unique experiences of Filipino teachers teaching English in secondary schools across Papua New Guinea (PNG).

This paper explores the lived experiences of Filipino English teachers in PNG, examining their adaptation, challenges, coping mechanisms, and pedagogical practices. Through their stories, this research seeks to uncover how these experiences impact their professional growth while maintaining their identity.

By examining these aspects, the study aims to provide a broader lens on how these teachers contribute to PNG’s educational landscape, demonstrating that experience indeed shapes both teachers and their students. In today’s globalized world, educator migration has become a notable phenomenon. The demand for English teachers in non-English-speaking countries continues to grow (Floris & Renandya, 2020). Among the most sought-after educators are Filipinos, recognized for their English proficiency, resilience, and strong work ethic. They are part of the nearly 11 million Overseas Filipino Workers globally, forming one of the largest global diasporas (San Juan Jr., 2016). Among these OFWs are teachers who have ventured into the “Land of the Unexpected”—Papua New Guinea—where they face unique challenges in their professional journeys.

Filipino secondary English teachers in PNG are not only tasked with teaching language in diverse classroom settings but must also navigate the difficulties posed by the country’s remoteness, lack of resources, cultural differences, and a foreign educational system. PNG, with its rich linguistic diversity of over 800 languages coexisting with English, Tok Pisin, and Hiri Motu (Wurm, 2003), continues to struggle with achieving widespread English proficiency. This makes the role of foreign English teachers, particularly Filipinos, critical in addressing these challenges, especially in remote areas where they form most English teachers in government secondary schools.

PNG’s educational system has undergone significant changes. Initially prioritizing vernacular languages through the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) framework to preserve indigenous tongues, the system transitioned to English as the medium of instruction starting in Grade 3, continuing through Grade 12 (NDOE, 2000; Joskin, 2013). In 2013, the Standards Based Curriculum (SBC) replaced OBE to address academic performance concerns. English, as the official medium of instruction, remains crucial in ensuring access to higher educational and professional opportunities, as emphasized by Dr. Uke Kombra, the Acting Secretary for Education, and reflected in national policies and examinations across Grade 8, 10, and 12.



While the PNG government has announced plans to phase out Grade 8 and 10 selection processes in favor of universal education up to Grade 12, examinations will continue to monitor student progress, underscoring the indispensable role of English in the educational system.

Despite extensive research on Filipino teachers' experiences abroad, limited literature focuses on their experiences in the South Pacific, particularly in PNG. This study addresses this gap by exploring the lived experiences of Filipino secondary English teachers in PNG, examining their personal, professional, and cultural challenges and growth. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach and interviews, the study aims to understand how these teachers adjust to the PNG educational environment, overcome obstacles, and impact their learners. By highlighting their voices, this research aims to contribute to enhancing professional development and support systems for Filipino English educators working overseas, particularly in challenging contexts like Papua New Guinea.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Constructivism Theory by Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), which emphasizes the central role of social interaction and cultural context in the development of learning, understanding, and cognition. Vygotsky asserts that knowledge is socially constructed through participation, communication, and interaction within cultural environments rather than being developed in isolation. He highlights the significance of collaborative learning and posits that cognitive development is deeply shaped by social environments and cultural tools.

Social Constructivism aligns with the present study, which seeks to explore how Filipino secondary English teachers in Papua New Guinea adapt their practices and strategies in response to the unique challenges they face in remote and culturally diverse environments. The theory emphasizes the active role of individuals in constructing knowledge and experiences, mirroring this research's focus on understanding the motivations, resilience, and lived experiences of these educators. Additionally, Vygotsky's emphasis on collaboration and dialogue resonates with the study's exploration of the Filipino contract officers' required partnerships with local understudies during their 12-, 24-, or 36-month contracts. This structured collaboration facilitates meetings, communication, and collective problem-solving, essential for navigating challenges and enhancing teaching practices in Papua New Guinea.

Key Concepts of Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Applied to the Study:

1. Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding

Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as the distance between what learners can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance from more knowledgeable others (MKOs). This study will examine the dynamics between Filipino contract officers and their local understudies, exploring how both parties engage in scaffolding to navigate instructional challenges and develop professionally. Filipino teachers' ZPD may be expanded through the



guidance of local teachers, administrators, and experienced expatriate colleagues, who serve as MKOs. Over time, scaffolding allows these teachers to gradually gain independence in addressing pedagogical and cultural challenges (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

2. Social Interaction and Collaborative Learning

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that effective learning occurs within a community of practice, facilitated by interactions with peers, colleagues, and community members. The lived experiences of Filipino teachers in PNG are deeply shaped by interactions with local students, teachers, administrators, Board of Governors (BOG) members, and the wider community. These interactions align with Vygotsky's collaborative learning perspective, fostering the development of culturally responsive and contextually appropriate teaching strategies through dialogue and shared practices.

3. Cultural Tools and Mediation

Vygotsky highlights that cultural tools such as language, symbols, and technology mediate human cognitive development. In the context of this study, Filipino teachers use the English language as the medium of instruction in PNG, serving as a crucial cultural and instructional tool. This aligns with Nieto's (2010) discussions on how teachers' cultural backgrounds influence instructional practices in cross-cultural environments. Filipino teachers must navigate teaching in a setting where students and colleagues possess varied English proficiency and cultural backgrounds, using these cultural and linguistic tools to mediate learning and facilitate effective instruction.

The metaphor of "walking with bound feet" encapsulates the unique teaching journey of Filipino secondary English teachers in Papua New Guinea, where cultural, linguistic, and societal barriers pose constraints that limit their ability to fully demonstrate their expertise despite their skills and commitment. This condition aligns with Vygotsky's ZPD, reflecting how teachers operate within the limitations imposed by their cultural and institutional contexts while seeking growth and adaptation through collaborative and mediated learning.

Framing this study using Vygotsky's Social Constructivism provides a lens to interpret the unique experiences of Filipino secondary English teachers in PNG. It allows for an examination of how social interaction, collaborative learning, scaffolding, and cultural tools shape their teaching practices, adaptation processes, and professional growth, offering valuable insights into how educators navigate and thrive within high-risk, culturally diverse teaching environments.

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by the conceptual framework, anchored on Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, which emphasizes how social interactions and cultural contexts shape knowledge construction and instructional practices.

Motivations for pursuing a career in PNG encompass factors such as career growth, financial goals, and the desire for cultural exchange, which influence Filipino secondary English



teachers' decisions to work abroad. Comparing experiences in the Philippines versus PNG captures the differences in educational systems, classroom environments, and institutional contexts that shape teachers' adjustments in instructional methods.

The English language curriculum in PNG includes teachers' perceptions of the national curriculum, the challenges they encounter in its implementation, and its perceived benefits, all of which impact how teachers deliver instruction in a foreign context. Pedagogical strategies and effectiveness encompass teachers' adaptation and modification of instructional methods to align with the needs of their students, emphasizing the application of culturally responsive pedagogy in the PNG classroom setting.

These independent variables collectively influence how Filipino secondary English teachers navigate their roles and adapt their instructional practices while working in PNG. It highlights how Filipino teachers, while navigating the educational landscape of PNG, utilize cultural tools, engage in collaborative learning, and scaffold their instructional practices in response to the contextual challenges they face.

Through this lens, the framework serves as a guide in exploring the lived experiences of Filipino secondary English teachers in Papua New Guinea, providing a structured approach for understanding how social interaction, cultural context, and challenges encountered shape their instructional frameworks and professional growth in a high-risk, culturally diverse teaching environment.

Research Questions

1. What are the motivations of the participants in pursuing a career in English language teaching in Papua New Guinea?
2. How do the participants compare their experiences as English language teachers in the Philippines and Papua New Guinea?
3. How do the participants describe the English language curriculum in Papua New Guinea?
4. What pedagogical teaching strategies in English do the participants consider effective among the students in Papua New Guinea?
5. What are the challenges encountered by the participants in the teaching of English in Papua New Guinea?
6. Based on the findings, what instructional framework for effective English instruction in Papua New Guinea may be crafted?

Literature Review

The lived experiences of Filipino teachers across the globe are diverse and are echoed throughout existing bodies of literature. Related studies have captured critical dimensions of these experiences, including adaptation, challenges, and coping mechanisms, professional development, and career growth opportunities.



Works Similarly, Bisenio (2024) describes the challenges faced by Filipino teachers in Japan, who often encounter marginalization and job dissatisfaction linked to being labeled as “nonnative,” despite their proficiency and competence. These studies collectively underscore the complexities of professional and personal identity negotiation among Filipino educators abroad, a process intricately tied to host country expectations and institutional frameworks. The varied experiences captured in these studies highlight the resilience and commitment of Filipino teachers as they navigate the complexities of working abroad. Their teaching journeys are testaments to their adaptability, as they reshape their personal and professional identities while maintaining a commitment to growth and excellence within their profession. Filipino educators actively engage in cultural adaptation, modify pedagogical practices, and contribute to their host communities while simultaneously enriching their professional competencies. Despite the valuable insights offered by existing literature on the experiences of Filipino educators overseas, there remains a noticeable gap regarding the specific contexts of Filipino teachers in Papua New Guinea.

Limited attention has been given to the security risks and gender-based challenges faced by Filipino educators in PNG, where societal structures are deeply rooted in tradition and cultural practices. This study aims to address this gap by giving voice to the lived experiences of Filipino secondary English teachers in Papua New Guinea. It seeks to understand how these educators navigate a society characterized by cultural diversity and traditional values while embracing local norms, understanding local languages, modifying teaching strategies, and integrating into the community.

By exploring the experiences of Filipino teachers in Papua New Guinea, this research extends the discourse on the lived experiences of Filipino educators abroad, offering context specific insights that can inform policies and support mechanisms to enhance the well-being and professional development of Filipino teachers in similarly challenging environments.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, which is suitable for interpreting individuals' lived experiences of teaching English in secondary schools in Papua New Guinea.

Specifically, a descriptive-phenomenological approach was utilized to gather rich and accurate data for this research. This approach is appropriate for exploring the participants' personal narratives, perceptions, and meanings they attach to their teaching experiences, allowing the researcher to understand these lived experiences from the teachers' perspectives.

Participants

The participants of this study were seven (7) Filipino secondary English teachers selected from various schools across Papua New Guinea through purposive sampling, a method commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select individuals who have directly experienced the



phenomenon being studied.

Instrument

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews as the primary data collection method for this study, employing a semi-structured interview guide to allow participants to freely share and discuss their lived experiences while maintaining focus on the objectives of the study. Audio recordings were used to preserve the interviews accurately for verbatim transcription, coding, and thematic analysis

Ethical Considerations

Ethical Considerations Ethical procedures included institutional permission, informed consent, a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, protection of participant confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Respect for the local culture, customs, and values of the participants was observed throughout the study. All information collected was treated with strict confidentiality, and personal identifiers was removed and replaced with codes to protect the participants' identities.

Statistical Treatment

No statistical treatment was applied because the study was qualitative. The author instead thoroughly examined the transcripts through thematic analysis and interpreted the meanings in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework.

Results and Discussion

The findings showed that Filipino Secondary English teachers who came to Papua New Guinea were motivated for various reasons personally, professionally and for practicality. The common themes that emerged among the participants are the sense of mission, and purpose, professional opportunity and career fulfillment, financial and economic motivation, the desire for simpler life and professional growth through cross-cultural teaching. The participants described the significant differences of teaching in Papua New Guinea compared to teaching in the Philippines. Participant 2 for example stated, "So, the first difficulty I should say of the teachers is the lack of materials for SBC..." Instructional materials are very limited to all the Filipino secondary English teachers in PNG even if they are already teaching in the country's capital. Additionally, participants also emphasized on the need for interactive and contextualized teaching approaches. This can help the students to be engaged and be proficient in both oral and written English.

The study developed an instructional framework that can become a practical guide to the English teachers, school leaders, school inspectors, and policy makers. The ENCORE+5S Instructional Framework for Effective English Instruction in Papua New Guinea is born from the exploration of the lived experiences of Filipino Secondary English teachers in Papua New Guinea. The primary issues identified that informed this framework included language barriers scarcity of instructional materials, limited access to technology, and the need for interactive and skills-integrated teaching strategies.

ENCORE+5S as acronym stands for:



E-English Only

N-Nurturing Inclusive and Learner-Centered Class Culture

C- Contextualized Instruction

O- Opportunities for Interactive and Differentiated Teaching

R-Resource-Rich Instruction

E-Engagement Through Professional Development Support

+5S stands for the 5 integrated macro skills such as speaking, reading, listening, writing and viewing.

Conclusions

The study concludes that the interconnected challenges encountered by Filipino Secondary English teachers in Papua New Guinea's multicultural and multilingual classrooms have profoundly shaped their professional practice and personal experiences. These challenges encompass linguistic barriers, cultural diversity, scarcity of instructional resources, limited technological access, security concerns, and gender-related issues. A significant influence on students' language proficiency is the pervasive use of Tok Pisin, which presents instructional challenges that push teachers to adjust language models and prioritize communicative competence strategies. This issue is further complicated by scarce instructional resources and infrastructural limitations, requiring teachers to demonstrate resourcefulness and creativity by integrating available multimedia tools, mobile applications, and locally based media to enhance lesson delivery. Moreover, teachers navigate cultural taboos and gender-based power dynamics, prompting the creation of inclusive, learner centered classroom environments grounded in cultural sensitivity and mutual respect. Security and safety concerns also impact teachers' emotional well-being, demanding resilience and adaptability in managing professional and personal challenges. Significantly, the study highlights the expanded roles of Filipino Secondary English teachers as department heads, in-service coordinators, school leaders, and mentors, positioning them as pivotal figures in instructional leadership and school governance. Although the study did not operate under a formal hypothesis, it substantiates the notion that Filipino teachers abroad cultivate personal resilience, instructional creativity, cultural empathy, and professional maturity within challenging yet professionally rewarding environments. The proposed ENCORE+5S Instructional Framework for Effective English Instruction in Papua New Guinea integrates these findings, offering a structured, culturally responsive, and practical guide to improve English language education in the country. It aims to assist teachers, school administrators, education district officers, and policymakers in enhancing the quality of English language teaching, promoting inclusive practices, and aligning local instruction with globally relevant standards in Papua New Guinea.



Recommendations

Given the scope and limitations of this study, which focused solely on the lived experiences of Filipino secondary English teachers in selected areas of Papua New Guinea, it is recommended that future research broaden its scope by expanding the number of participants. This may include teachers of other nationalities working in Papua New Guinea, such as Indian and Australian educators, or encompass all Filipino teachers across the country to gain a more comprehensive understanding of expatriate teaching experiences in diverse contexts. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the *ENCORE+5S Instructional Framework* be utilized as a practical guide to address instructional challenges in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. This framework integrates Contextualized Instruction, Responsive and Differentiated Teaching, Interactive and 5 Macro Skills-Based Learning, Technology Integration, Professional Development Support, Inclusive Learner-Centered Class Culture, and the Effective Use of Instructional Materials and Resources, making it a holistic tool for improving English instruction in Papua New Guinea. Furthermore, it is recommended that this framework be incorporated into school-based in-service programs in secondary schools to address the needs of English teachers, enhance their instructional practices, and equip them with culturally responsive strategies. Inspectors, district supervisors, principals, and in-service coordinators are encouraged to endorse this framework to Heads of English Departments to gain practical insights for improving English language teaching and learning within their schools.

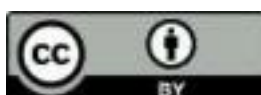
Finally, it is recommended that future research explore the impact of the framework's implementation in secondary schools across Papua New Guinea, including gathering student perspectives and assessing the framework's effectiveness in enhancing English language proficiency and classroom engagement. These efforts will contribute to sustaining professional growth among teachers, promoting inclusive education, and advancing the quality of English instruction in dynamic, multicultural environments like Papua New Guinea.

Acknowledgment

The author is deeply grateful to her adviser, Dr. Sicat, the members of the oral defense panel, and the Philippine Women's University School of Education Dean and her staff. The author specially extends her utmost gratitude to the seven brave souls whose experiences in teaching English in Papua New Guinea Secondary Schools have shaped their colorful experiences and generously shared it for this study. She is also thankful to the unconditional support she received from her family, particularly from her son and husband, her anchor.

References

- Bisenio, J. B. (2024). Filipino English teachers in Japan: Exploring subject positioning in teaching experiences. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 22(3), 1864–1871.
<https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.22.3.1907>



- Chua, J. (2021). The lived experiences of Filipino teachers teaching in Texas: A transcendental phenomenological study (Doctoral dissertation, Stephen F. Austin State University).
- Kale, J. (1990). Language planning and the language of education in Papua New Guinea. In R. Baldauf Jr. & A. Luke (Eds.), *Language planning and education in Australasia and South Pacific* (pp. 182–196). Multilingual Matters.
- Mansueto, C. D., Canoy, P., & Alban, C. (2022). Teaching in a foreign land: The lived experience of Filipino English teachers in South Korea. *Jilin Daxue Xuebao (Journal of Jilin University)*, 41(5), 45–56.
<https://jilindaxuexuebao.org/1671-5497-jju-v41-i05/>
- National Department of Education (NDOE). (1986). *Philosophy of education*. Department of Education.
- Nieto, S. (2010). *Language, culture, and teaching: Critical perspectives* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Ospina, S. (2020). Living and teaching internationally: Teachers talk about personal experiences, benefits. *Management in Education*, 34(2), 51–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240920915013>
- Pacala, F. A. (2024). The exodus of Filipino teachers to Uzbekistan: A hermeneutic phenomenological study. *Humaniora: Journal of Humanities*, 36(2), 244–257.
<https://doi.org/10.7454/hubs.asia.1100424>
- Real, J., & Flordeliz, J. (2024). Filipino teachers' revelations in working abroad. *Global Research in Higher Education*, 7(3), 18–25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/grhe.v7n3p18>
- San Juan, E., Jr. (2016). *Filipinos in the diaspora: Some unfinished business*. Sussex Academic Press.
- Sereni, & Yanto. (2023). A story of South-East Asian TESOL: Why teach abroad — Its opportunities and challenges. *Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang*.
- Seddiki, Y. (2022). The Role of Classroom Interaction in Developing English as a Foreign Language. *Ennass Journal*, 9(3), 797–811
- Sumalinog, G. G. (2020). English language teachers in diaspora: A Heideggerian phenomenology. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 19(11), 283–295.
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.11.16>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wood, D. J., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89–100.
- Wurm, S. A. (2003). The language situation and language endangerment in the Greater Pacific area. In M. Janse & S. Tol (Eds.), *Language Death and Language Maintenance: Theoretical, Practical and Descriptive Approaches* (pp. 15–38). John Benjamins Publishing.
<https://benjamins.com/catalog/persons/15704>

