

Teaching in “The “Land of Smile””: Anecdote of Filipino Substitute Teachers in Thailand

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Abstract:- This study explores the experiences of Filipino substitute teachers in Thailand, also known as the Land of Smile. The study focuses on the challenges and rewards faced by these teachers while teaching abroad. The research involved seven participants who were substitute teachers. The study used in-depth interviews, both virtual and limited face-to-face, while strictly adhering to health protocols. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data. The experiences of Filipino substitute teachers in Thailand were found to include good compensation, less paperwork, and a low cost of living. However, the challenges they faced included language barriers and a lack of professional development opportunities. Based on these experiences and challenges, the study suggests that teachers should develop adaptability and flexibility skills and actively participate in training and seminars to promote professional growth. The study aims to contribute new insights to enhance the competence of Filipino teachers and improve programs for their welfare, in line with the MATATAG agenda of the education department.

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching abroad is seen as both an opportunity and a challenge, particularly for Filipino educators who often choose to practice their profession in foreign countries. Working as teachers in a different country offers personal growth and the chance to earn a promising salary and benefits. According to Serbes (2017), teaching overseas provides an excellent opportunity for academic and social development. When teachers work abroad, they not only meet the needs of their students but also enhance their teaching skills, foreign language proficiency, information acquisition and utilization, decision-making abilities, communication skills, and adaptability to different situations. Additionally, they gain knowledge about other cultures, engage in positive interactions with diverse groups of people, learn to respect and appreciate others from different backgrounds, and develop tolerance. Thailand is a popular destination for Filipino educators, as they are often hired as non-native English-speaking teachers to assist local Thai teachers in teaching English. This hiring trend contributes to the growing number of non-native English language teachers and immigrants in Thailand.

Thailand is a popular destination for Filipino educators looking to teach abroad. According to Floris (2013) as cited by Ulla (2018), there is a significant number of non-native English-speaking teachers who are recruited to assist local Thai teachers in teaching English. Among these non-native English-speaking teachers are Filipinos. The hiring of Filipinos as ASEAN local-teachers to teach English in Thailand contributes to the overall increase in non-native English language teachers and the growing immigrant population in the country.

In addition, according to Aragon (2023), Thailand is a highly sought-after destination for teaching abroad due to various reasons. There is a high demand for teachers, numerous opportunities for paid teaching positions, and a wide range of school options, giving teachers the freedom to find their ideal job in Thailand. Additionally, the country is known for its friendly people, stunning beaches, exciting recreational activities, and delicious Thai cuisine.

According to Holmes and Tangtongtavy (2023), Thailand is commonly known as The Land of Smiles because a smile in Thailand carries a deeper meaning and serves as a form of subtle communication. It is fascinating for visitors to see how Thai people can maintain a smile in various situations, even when it may seem unexpected. Additionally, SOTC (2023) confirms that the nickname Land of Smiles is not just a marketing strategy. Thailand provides a perfect combination of elements that make it an ideal destination for tourists worldwide. Whether it's the stunning natural landscapes, vibrant nightlife, delicious cuisine, luxurious resorts, thrilling adventure sports, shopping opportunities, or entertainment options, Thailand offers the best of everything at a relatively affordable price.

According to The Pinoy OFW (2023), many Filipinos have taken advantage of the opportunity to work as teachers in Thailand. Filipino teachers are highly regarded in Thailand due to their proficiency in English and their passion for teaching. They are considered to be among the best teachers in the country. Filipino teachers meet the government's standards for qualifications, including English proficiency, and they are known for their dedication to helping students learn. Many schools in Thailand recognize and appreciate the love for teaching that Filipino teachers bring to their classrooms.

Teaching in Thailand is a popular choice for those seeking work abroad due to its tropical climate and the charm of Southeast Asia. It is often seen as a good starting point for teachers who want to travel the world, as regional travel is affordable and enjoyable, and the infrastructure is comfortable. While the pay may not be high, Thailand is an affordable and enjoyable place to live (Bond, 2023). According to Ulla (2019), Filipino teachers possess adequate pedagogical abilities to teach English as a second language. However, they feel that there is a lack of opportunities for professional growth in order to enhance their skills in teaching English as a foreign language.

In conclusion, Many Filipino teachers choose to work in Thailand because of the higher salary and lower cost of living compared to their home country. These practical reasons attract a significant number of Filipino professionals to consider Thailand as their new place of work and residence. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the experiences of Filipino substitute teachers in Thailand, also known as the "land of smiles."

II. METHOD

The qualitative phenomenological research design is used in this study to collect the data necessary to answer the research questions. Information includes participant in-depth interviews offering opportunity for participants to speak openly and candidly. This phenomenological study followed the descriptive explanatory design. Hatch (2012) describes qualitative research as naturalistic research or into everyday living. Direct observations were made of human behavior in any life. Naturalistic researchers believe that gaining knowledge from experiences that have initiate familiarity with an issue is far better than the objective among approach that supposedly characterizes quantitative approaches.

In qualitative phenomenology, the informants shared their experiences and observations on a phenomenon under study. It is important to note that during the gathering of information, researcher may obtain information either through In-depth interviews or focus group discussions. The participants bring out their subjective and objective views based on their experiences. In analyzing the information data gathered, the focus of the researchers' attention must be on the common experiences and the frequently mentioned ideas by the participants. The categorization of significant statements of the participants as reflected in the verbal transcriptions forms is an important part of data analysis. This process requires the researcher's ability to interpret and analyze the data with adequacy.

In exploring the phenomenological inquiry, seven (7) participants are involved and they were substitute teachers teaching in Thailand. The participants have at least 3 years of teaching experience as substitute teachers. Purposive sampling

is employed in selecting the participants of this inquiry. Patton (1990) and Palinkas, et al (2015) describe purposive sampling as widely used and popular in qualitative examination for the identification and determination of data rich cases identified with the wonder of premium. Purposive inspecting is the best system when one needs to think about a specific family foundation with proficient specialists inside member's determination is exceptionally applicable for this exploration as individuals are always looked upon for learning and data.

I ensure that my study follows the ethical principles as described by (Mack et al, 2005), namely: *respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent and confidentiality*. My role as the researcher of this study is vital in creating credible research findings. Basically, my role was to facilitate the conduct of interviews and discussions through the research questions and probing statements. In this study, I personally transcribed the data collected and analyzed the transcription. Thematic analysis was employed through formulated categories, codes and themes of the verbal transcriptions. The themes were meticulously interpreted giving light into the inquiry of the study.

As the researcher, I extensively unfolded the phenomenon based on the lived-experiences of the participants. Comprehensive discussions, overlaying and connecting the findings, creating meaning and color to the phenomenological inquiry will be the main process. Archival references and studies utilized by the researcher will strengthen the assertions and realizations introduced in this study.

This phenomenological research used with in-depth interviews of participants to obtain information data. Before the interview, I secured for the participants' consent. I also emphasized to the participants that they were allowed to ask question for clarify any matter regarding the study and ask their consent also to record the course of the conversation with the assurance that everything shall be dealt with utmost confidentiality and that the information gathered are for academic purpose only.

As the researcher, I compared and cross-checked the consistency of information. The consistency was examined by comparing observations with interviews, comparing information obtained in questionnaires with what participants shared in interviews and comparing the perspectives of different participants.

The participants reviewed the transcription of every interview session. According to Patton (2002), researchers can learn a great deal about the accuracy, completeness, fairness and validity of their data analysis by having the participants described in that analysis react to what is described and concluded. Participant feedback confirmed the findings and assists in confirming that each summary of the interview

session was accurate and ensure that the researcher was asking the right questions.

This study employed triangulation which according to Nightingale (2020) is a technique to analyze results of the same study using different methods of data collection. It is used for three main purposes: to enhance validity, to create a more in-depth picture of a research problem, and to interrogate different ways of understanding a research problem. In conclusion, the qualitative phenomenology is employed in this study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based from the information gathered, the following themes on the experiences of Filipino substitute teachers in Thailand, “The Land of Smile” were as follows:

➤ *Good Compensation*

Good compensation is the payment made to an employee in exchange for their skills or unique contributions to the company. Good compensation is one of the reasons why Filipino substitute teachers decided to teach abroad like the country of Thailand. This is supported by the study of Leonard (2019) who attest that smart employers know that keeping quality employees requires providing the right compensation and benefits package.

Similarly, Martin (2022) explains that providing competitive compensation is undoubtedly one of the best ways to attract and retain the best-performing talent to your organization. In some instances, salaries or wages alone might not be sufficient. In support, Ulla (2017) state that Filipino teachers in Thailand had a positive perception towards teaching English, as they had better salary rates and opportunities compared to when they were teaching in their home country.

➤ *Less Paperwork*

Another theme that emerged on the experiences of Filipino substitute teachers is less paperwork. Less paperwork is undoubtedly one of the advantages for Filipino teachers in Thailand. In the study of Spence (2022), some foreign teachers recounted that there is less paperwork involved in the Thai public school compared to their home countries, the only exception being the grading of exam-test papers.

In support, Beckett (2020) comments that the less time you or your staff spend on paperwork, the more time that could be spent on more business-critical or revenue generating tasks. However, we can't eradicate admin entirely, so instead we must make use of technology that can help to speed up the process – while also eliminating the need for outdated paper forms.

➤ *Low Cost of Living*

It is evident that the teacher-participants observed that low cost of living is one of the experience of teachers who are teaching in Thailand. In the study of Davies (2023) who articulates that the average monthly salary for English teachers in Thailand will typically vary from around \$915 to \$1,300 USD for first-time teachers. Teachers with higher-level teaching or TEFL qualifications and more teaching experience can expect to earn around \$1,500 to \$2,500 USD per month depending on their school type and location.

➤ *Language Barrier*

It is one of the themes on the challenges of participants in this study. As cited by Gratis (2022) the biggest obstacle is the ability (or inability) to understand what others are saying. Every conversation, email, report, and memo will be unproductive if the words don't make sense to others. A barrier could refer to national and cultural languages but may also include specialized knowledge or speech impairments.

On language barrier, Encore (2023) explained that when most people hear the term “language barrier,” they immediately imagine speakers from two different countries trying to negotiate a price or discuss the directions to the nearest hotel. In reality, this is just one of many language barriers in communication (also called linguistic barriers) that speakers from countries around the world run into every single day. When someone who doesn't understand, a certain language well is trying to communicate with someone who understands it perfectly, we say that there's a language barrier in proficiency between them.

➤ *Lack of Professional Development*

Another challenges that the Filipino substitute teachers-participants encountered in Thailand is the lack of professional development. In the study of Parsons (2022) who asserts that professional development is gaining new skills through continuing education and career training after entering the workforce. It can include taking classes or workshops, attending professional or industry conferences, or earning a certificate to expand knowledge.

In his study, Ulla (2018) concludes that although Filipino teachers were positive about teaching English to Thai students, they perceived that English language teaching in the country is a challenging task and one of the factors is the lack of teachers' professional development.

In the light of the participants' experiences and challenges, the following are the insights drawn:

➤ *Foster Adaptability and Flexibility Skills.*

Todd (2023) elaborates that adaptability in the workplace can be defined as creating modifications or changes in oneself to adapt or suit the new environment. For a work environment culture, it connotes being opened to new ideas, innovations, or

alterations. Someone with this skill can work independently or in groups, or perform tasks not designed only for a single individual. An adaptable employee is an individual that can implement multiple tasks, perform various assignments by establishing priorities, and making attitudinal changes to align with the new culture.

➤ *Participation in Trainings/Seminar on Professional Growth.*

Indeed (2023) articulates that professional development can increase your skills as an employee, which can lead to new opportunities and career advancement. Professional development includes advancing skills, traits and competencies that contribute to your success in the workplace. Furthermore, Tagvenue (2022) attest that employee development not only empowers employees or boosts employee morale, but it allows your staff to hone their skills and talents through new knowledge. When providing employees with new abilities, companies also lower their turnover rate.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the experiences of Filipino substitute teachers in Thailand involves Good Compensation, less paperwork and Low cost of living while the challenges are Language Barrier and Lack of professional development. It is the insight of this inquiry that Filipino substitute teachers in Thailand must endeavor to foster adaptability and flexibility skills. They must engage themselves in trainings and seminars that could hone their competence as they render their teaching career in the “Land of Smile”.

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