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Bridging local education and global careers: Experiences of university alumni teaching abroad

Yerel Eğitimi Küresel Kariyerlerle Birleştirmek: Yurtdışında Öğretmenlik Yapan Üniversite Mezunlarının Deneyimleri

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Abstract

This narrative inquiry study examined the experiences of Teacher Education program alumni who opted to pursue teaching careers overseas. Their experiences provided insights and recommendations on how their undergraduate training prepared them in international education settings. Through the analysis of their narratives, 15 teachers, 10 female, and 5 male, the study provided an understanding of how they transitioned from the Philippines' cultural values and educational system to their new school environment. After the thematic analysis, the results led to three main themes: professional preparedness, cultural adaptation, and institutional support for internationalization. Therefore, this suggests that internationally oriented curricula, cross-cultural training, and global partnerships must be strengthened by universities offering teacher education programs to develop future educators who can thrive in international academic settings. Furthermore, this study proposes to align national higher education policies with international programs and the global mobility of teachers to enable them to teach overseas.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Teaching, Global Education, Higher Education Policy Internationalization, Teacher Mobility

Öz

Bu anlatı araştırması, öğretmen yetiştirme programı mezunlarının yurtdışında öğretmenlik yapma kararı sonrası edindikleri deneyimleri incelemiştir. Katılımcıların deneyimleri, lisans eğitimlerinin uluslararası eğitim ortamlarına nasıl hazırlık sağladığına dair önemli içgörüler ve öneriler sunmuştur. Filipinler'in kültürel değerleri ve eğitim sisteminden, görev yaptıkları yeni okul ortamına geçiş süreçlerini kapsayan anlatıların analiziyle, 10'u kadın ve 5'i erkek olmak üzere toplam 15 öğretmenin deneyimleri değerlendirilmiştir. Tematik analiz sonucunda üç ana tema öne çıkmıştır: mesleki hazırlık, kültürel uyum ve uluslararasılaşmaya yönelik kurumsal destek. Bu bulgular, öğretmen yetiştiren üniversitelerin uluslararası odaklı müfredatlar, kültürlerarası eğitim ve küresel iş birliklerini güçlendirmesi gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca çalışma, öğretmenlerin yurtdışında görev yapabilmelerini kolaylaştırmak amacıyla, ulusal yükseköğretim politikalarının uluslararası programlar ve öğretmen hareketliliğiyle uyumlu hale getirilmesini önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültürlerarası Öğretim, Küresel Eğitim, Yükseköğretim Politikalarının Uluslararasılaşması, Öğretmen Hareketliliği.

Introduction

In today's time, teachers can teach beyond borders with a single click, globalization and internationalization have transformed from abstract concepts into tangible forces as new perspectives in higher education worldwide (De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Karim et al., 2024; Ul Hassan, 2025). While digital connectivity expands and access to information goes beyond geographical boundaries, universities are increasingly expected to prepare graduates for careers beyond their home countries (Bucăța & Tileagă, 2024). The rise of online learning, international academic collaborations, and cross-border employment opportunities has made it imperative for higher education institutions (HEIs) to reevaluate how they equip students with the necessary skills to thrive in interconnected professional environments (Ciumacenco, 2024; Kang et al., 2024). These changes are particularly significant for teacher education, as Filipino educators are among the most mobile professionals worldwide, often teaching in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms with varied pedagogical approaches (Sukjairungwattana et al., 2025).

While policies supporting internationalization exist, their effectiveness in preparing graduates for global teaching roles is underexplored (Balagtas & Santarita, 2021; Cajilog & Pabalan, 2023; Francisco, et al., 2023, Mananay, et al., 2024; Ramos, et al., 2023). This study focuses on this gap by analyzing the experiences of alumni from a Philippine state university who have pursued teaching careers abroad. This study capture narratives of teachers who transitioned from their local teacher education programs to international schools, where they encountered new challenges and opportunities. Using a narrative inquiry approach, the study explores key themes such as adjusting to different educational systems, adapting to multicultural classrooms, refining professional skills, and overcoming language barriers. Through their stories, this research provides valuable insights into how academic programs support readiness for international work and identifies areas where improvements are needed to support future teachers.

The internationalization of higher education (IHE) in the Philippines and Southeast Asia illustrates the relationship between global imperatives and the preservation of local and national identities, a connection visible in the career trajectories of Filipino university alumni (Bagayawa et al., 2024; Mpamhanga et al., 2024). Philippine IHE policies often attempt to harmonize global norms with local historical and sociocultural realities, constructing a hybrid national identity that alumni inevitably carry into their professional lives abroad (Eder, 2025). This results in tensions between adopting Western academic paradigms and maintaining Filipino knowledge systems, which defines the challenges in global teaching (Diano et al., 2023). Despite the general trends of economic globalization and regionalism—especially under the ASEAN umbrella—factors such as resource constraints, policy environments, and cultural frameworks shape the preparedness and adaptability of Filipino alumni for the global education market (Magan et al., 2025). Private institutions, for instance, have advanced internationalization efforts in their teacher education programs (TEPs) through quality enhancement and knowledge creation (Chao Jr. & Symaco, 2023). However, these efforts are often hampered by collaboration inadequacies and sustainability issues, thus affecting the competencies and resilience of graduates entering the international teaching workforce (Alimorong, 2025).

Further reflections on the experiences of international faculty members in Thailand reveal that alumni, as global educators, are not merely adapting to foreign curricula but actively participating in reshaping education through cross-cultural engagement and curriculum redesign (Lemana II et al., 2024). A study conducted at a university in Central Luzon, PH, corroborates this, concluding that while strategic internationalization measures have been initiated by HEIs, proactive leadership and continuous improvement are essential for fully equipping graduates for global careers (Rogayan Jr. & Mendoza, 2023). This study also noted the role of inclusive education as a catalyst for internationalization, suggesting that higher education institutions must deliberately develop cultural sensitivity, collaboration, and global competence among students—essential skills for alumni aspiring to succeed internationally.

Thus, in this study, alumni acknowledged that their university training provided a strong foundation in pedagogy and subject knowledge. However, they also identified gaps—particularly in cultural preparedness and exposure to international teaching methodologies. While technical skills remain fundamental, the ability to engage in diverse educational settings, communicate effectively in multilingual environments, and understand global education trends has become just as essential. This surmises the need for Philippine teacher education programs to integrate intentional strategies, such as exposure to international teaching practices, collaborative projects with foreign institutions, and coursework that develops students' understanding of global education systems. An acknowledgment of the importance of internationalization in higher education has been given by the Philippine government and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) 55 series of 2016 mandate the integration of the international, intercultural, and global dimensions into teaching-learning, research, and services, and CMO 62 series of 2016 encourages transnational educational programs to widen access to quality education. However, the extent of these policies to teacher education graduates is still an open question. This study illustrates how these policies are experienced at the ground level, focusing on the challenges and opportunities encountered by Filipino educators overseas.

Apart from insights gained from the alumni experiences, this research hopes to contribute to the literature by pushing for the creation of applicable international opportunities for Filipino students. Although universities have existing internationalization policies, their value is mostly embedded in the implementation, especially for teachers working abroad who need actual international experiences. By understanding how alumni successfully transitioned their careers from the Philippines to another country, universities can make more informed decisions regarding curriculum development, faculty training, and student support systems. Additionally, strengthening partnerships with international schools, expanding exchange programs, and promoting research collaborations can be conducted to develop graduates' confidence and adaptability in diverse educational settings.

By analyzing the experiences of university alumni who are now teaching overseas, this study aims to bridge the gap between policy and practice to ensure that future educators are not only equipped with teaching skills but are also prepared to grow and thrive as international professionals. As more alumni take their careers abroad, it becomes increasingly important to regularly assess how Philippine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are preparing students for this kind of global journey. This research hopes to encourage practical, explicit approaches to internationalization that go beyond policy documents and translate into actionable, meaningful opportunities for future teachers inside and outside one's country.

Methodology

Through qualitative research design, narrative inquiry in particular (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000), this study examined the experiences of teacher education alumni, from a Philippine university, who are currently teaching abroad. To provide a nuanced understanding of how the alumni shaped their professional journey in teaching overseas, this study employed narrative analysis as it channels an in-depth examination of their personal experiences thus allowing a thorough elaboration and investigation. By focusing on individual stories, this approach provides rich, contextually embedded insights to understand how the undergraduate teacher training program prepared them for international classrooms and what skills they found most valuable in their careers abroad. Through their personal stories, the study also identifies areas where teacher education programs could better support future graduates who seek opportunities outside the Philippines.

For the data gathering, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a researcher-developed set of 10 questions. These interviews allowed alumni to reflect on their experiences from pre-service training to professional practice. To provide depth to the analysis, this study incorporated previously stored but unanalyzed data, which consisted of recorded reflections and written accounts of institutional studies of teacher education alumni. This additional dataset supplemented the newly gathered interview

data, allowing a detailed examination of past expectations versus current realities. Once the initial themes were identified, these data were re-examined to test for consistency and to substantiate the findings. Thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 2011) were prioritized, enabling a rich narrative that conveyed the teaching abroad experience. The research process was well-documented through an audit trail to ensure transparency throughout the data collection process until the final analysis.

Participants were purposely selected (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024) to include a group of alumni who had experience teaching overseas. The study focused on those who had earned a Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) degree between 2010 and 2017 and had spent at least one year teaching outside the Philippines. The one-year criterion was established to ensure that participants had sufficient experience to reflect on their adaptation to international classrooms. This time frame was chosen because these graduates belonged to the same curriculum offered in the university, to ensure consistency in their teacher education training and allow for meaningful comparisons. The sample size was determined based on data saturation, and the final sample size was deemed sufficient for narrative analysis as it provided rich, in-depth data for the identification of recurring themes and perspectives.

Data were analyzed using QDA Miner software, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, which includes familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, definition, and final reporting. To enhance credibility, an intercoder reliability check was conducted by having a second researcher independently review a subset of coded data. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved to ensure consistency in theme interpretation. This structured approach allowed for a thorough examination of the alumni's experiences and provided insights into how their training aligned with the realities of teaching abroad.

The study was guided by two key questions:

1. What are the experiences of alumni in teaching overseas, particularly with the skills they gained from their teacher education program?
2. What challenges and competency gaps do they encounter as overseas teachers?

To answer these questions, interviews were conducted online using Google Classroom. Each session lasted 60 to 90 minutes, allowing for meaningful conversations with enough time. Google Classroom was used as the primary platform because the university where the authors are affiliated has a paid version with premium access, creating a stable and secure environment for conducting online interviews. The interviews began with a review of the research objectives and the informed consent process, to establish that participants were fully aware of their rights. Open-ended questions were used to elicit comprehensive responses, and follow-up questions were used, to enable participants to elaborate on their views. Throughout the discussions, the researchers were in a formal yet approachable tone to create a platform where participants felt at ease sharing their experiences of successes and failures.

The alumni narratives depict themes such as Exposure to International Experiences, Filipino Identity in Teaching English, Training and Professional Competence, Continuous Learning, Language Barrier Challenges, and Lack of Intentionality in Internationalization.

Ethical principles were practiced throughout the entire process of the study (Zhang et al., 2024) by providing a detailed explanation of the research, its objectives, methodology, possible risks, and benefits before participation. All participants were assured of their voluntary participation and they could withdraw at any time without any cost. Reports of this paper used pseudonyms for each participant, to maintain anonymity and confidentiality strictly and only the lead investigator has access to the compilation of the data gathered. While there was no formal review by a research ethics committee, the study adhered to conventional ethical principles for qualitative research. Institutional ethical principles were adhered to by the research team to ensure that all processes involving data collection and analysis were conducted with integrity and respect for the confidentiality of the participants. Through informed consent, transparency, and secure data management, the study was of the same ethical standard as research subject to formal review.

This study provides perspectives on how Philippine teacher education institutions develop their

graduates for work in an international education setting. By analyzing the experiences of Filipino teachers abroad, the study contributes to the existing literature regarding higher education internationalization and provides recommendations for teacher training programs. The findings are also relevant to foreign countries to prepare their future teachers for opportunities in an increasingly interconnected world.

Results

This study about Bridging Local Education and Global Careers: Experiences of University Alumni Teaching Abroad can be summarized as follows:

Table 1. Percentages and frequencies of themes and codes.

Themes	Category	Code	Count	% Codes	Cases	% Cases
Exposure sparks inspiration and provides a link	Experiences	Exposure to Foreign Students	33	16.80%	9	75.00%
	Experiences	Partnership in genuine cultural exchange	15	7.80%	3	25.00%
	Experiences	Lit inspires foreign travel	6	3.00%	3	25.00%
	Experiences	Multinational interactions	12	6.00%	3	25.00%
	Skills	Social skills	21	10.80%	9	75.00%
Filipino impression as a challenge and advantage	Experiences	Filipino as advantage	6	3.00%	3	25.00%
	Experiences	Compensates for low recognition	12	6.00%	3	25.00%
	Skills	Work values	3	1.50%	3	25.00%
	Skills	Flexibility	33	16.80%	12	100.00%
Trained to Professional competence	Experiences	Appreciated	9	4.50%	3	25.00%
	Experiences	Competence is asset	15	7.80%	6	50.00%
	Experiences	Introduces own improvements	27	13.80%	9	75.00%
	Experiences	Philippine Education training is an advantage	12	6.00%	3	25.00%
	Experiences	Setting new directions	18	9.30%	3	25.00%
	Experiences	Promotion	3	1.50%	3	25.00%
	Experiences	Admin support	3	1.50%	3	25.00%
	Skills	Classroom Management	24	12.30%	9	75.00%
	Skills	Communication skills	33	16.80%	9	75.00%
	Skills	Collaboration or teamwork	3	1.50%	3	25.00%
	Skills	Creativity	24	12.30%	6	50.00%
	Skills	Curriculum Development	3	1.50%	3	25.00%
	Skills	Motivation skills	18	9.30%	6	50.00%
	Skills	Sensitivity	3	1.50%	3	25.00%
	Skills	Organizational and leadership	9	4.50%	6	50.00%
	Skills	Planning activities	18	9.30%	9	75.00%
	Skills	Multitasking	3	1.50%	3	25.00%
	Skills	Use of pedagogy	27	13.80%	12	100.00%
Continuous learning	Experiences	Practical learning	9	4.50%	3	25.00%
	Experiences	Professional Development	21	10.80%	6	50.00%
	Experiences	Professional Experiences	12	6.00%	6	50.00%
	Experiences	Reaching out to mentors	3	1.50%	3	25.00%
	Skills	Knowing culture	9	4.50%	3	25.00%
	Skills	Learning skills	6	3.00%	6	50.00%
	Skills	Supervisory	9	4.50%	3	25.00%

Language barrier	Experiences	Pair teaching	3	1.50%	3	25.00%
	Experiences	Translator	24	12.30%	12	100.00%
	Challenges	Language- barrier	27	13.80%	12	100.00%
	Challenges	Mismatched expectations	9	4.50%	3	25.00%
Lack of intentionality	Gaps	No direct instruction	33	16.80%	12	100.00%
	Gaps	Strategies	3	1.50%	3	25.00%

The following themes were deduced from this study:

Experience vis-a-vis skills

Students with strong social skills seemed to benefit the most from these experiences, as their ability to connect with people from different backgrounds helped them build meaningful relationships. In some cases, these connections directly led to job opportunities abroad. The study shows that, beyond classroom learning, having the confidence to interact in diverse settings is an important advantage for educators looking to teach internationally.

As universities in the Philippines continue to promote internationalization, providing more opportunities for genuine cultural exchange can better equip future teachers for the realities of working in different countries. Rather than being just one-time events, these experiences should be designed to leave a lasting impact, helping students feel more prepared and confident in pursuing global teaching careers. Two participants quoted:

“During my early days, I used to think that teaching wasn’t for me. However, I always had a thought at the back of my mind that if I ever did teach, it would be in English and not in the Philippines, but abroad. It was then, in my second year, that I met a Korean exchange student from Andong National University. Then, I realized the power of English as a tool that can take us places. While people from around the world came to the Philippines to learn English, I started thinking, “What if I go there and teach instead?”. I started communicating with Koreans, and eventually, someone very interested in bringing me there appeared. It was probably around my third year when I felt like I had a strong foundation and an edge in teaching English, particularly to Koreans. With this confidence, I believed I could survive teaching English in another country, especially Korea. That’s where it all began.” [Participant 04]

“During my time in college, I had the pleasure of meeting a researcher who had previously served as a Peace Corps volunteer. We took several classes together and afterward; I had the opportunity to enjoy a cup of coffee with her outside. Most of my classmates left for home, but since my home was about thirty minutes away from campus, I decided to stay and chat. I’ve always been interested in learning about different cultures, so it was a great opportunity to do so. During our conversation, we discussed language learning in America, which came naturally to them as it was their native language. The researcher also asked me about teaching abroad, to which I responded that I was open to the idea but not necessarily in America. It’s funny how things you say in the past can eventually come true after ten years. Another memorable experience during my time in college was interacting closely with Koreans during one-on-one classes after their group sessions with our professors.” [Participant 012]

These findings connect with Wu (2024), who points out that helping students develop intercultural competence requires thoughtful and practical strategies in teacher education. When graduates step into classrooms abroad, they face new cultures, teaching methods, and expectations (Liu, 2024). Without proper preparation, these differences can lead to misunderstandings or struggles in communication and

classroom management (Vaishnav, 2025). Including global perspectives and real-life international teaching experiences in teacher education can help future educators adapt more smoothly to international settings (Qing & Jing, 2024).

Kaspersen & Gabriel (2024) also remind us that higher education institutions are not separate from globalization but are part of it. This means that teaching, research, and curriculum development should not be limited to what is familiar within a single country (Kolesnyk & Biseth, 2024). Instead, teacher training programs should introduce students to a wider view of education—one that considers different educational systems, policies, and cultural contexts (Langat, 2024). At the same time, institutions must carefully reflect on how they engage with globalization to ensure that internationalization is meaningful rather than just an added label (Whitsed et al., 2021).

Likewise, Novykova (2024) concluded that it is urgent to expose teacher education students to internationalization. For them to thrive in this interconnected world, universities must develop inter-institutional collaborations, establish opportunities for exchange programs, and conduct activities involving global issues. Such efforts in teacher training programs can develop the teaching and adaptive skills needed for teaching outside their home country (Cherniavska et al., 2023). Through this development of skills that apply to different cultural perspectives, future teachers can achieve confidence in teaching internationally. In this way, the integration of internationalization can better prepare teachers to thrive in an interconnected world.

Filipino impression as a challenge and advantage

There are varying perceptions of employers towards Filipino teachers in teaching English language across Asia. In Cambodia, being a Filipino teacher is seen as an advantage, with employers actively seeking native Filipino or an English native speaker as teachers due to their reputation for strong communication skills and effective teaching methods. However, in countries like South Korea, there is a strong preference for hiring native English speakers which places Filipino teachers in a disadvantageous position. To compensate, Filipino teachers leverage their strong skills such as strong professional competencies, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous learning to gain recognition in the field.

Despite these challenges, many Filipino teachers believe their cultural background gives them a distinct advantage, especially for their positive work ethic and interpersonal skills. Alumni participants shared that they are often perceived as hardworking, flexible, and dedicated, qualities that have helped them secure teaching positions and build strong relationships in their workplaces. Their ability to adapt to different teaching environments, coupled with a deep sense of professionalism, enables them to successfully teach even in settings where native speakers are preferred. These findings noted that while language proficiency is important work values and teaching effectiveness shapes the success of Filipino educators in international classrooms. Two participants discussed:

“I believe that our use of the English language in college, Ma’am, is one of the significant advantages because, Ma’am, even though we are Filipino, when it comes to employment, they are already considering it as a qualification. They are now looking for native speakers and Filipinos. We are included. There are already job postings stating “native speaker and Filipino,” so the good thing about us is our language, the second language we use.” [Participant 02]

“When it comes to classroom management, it seems like we are often noticed for being somewhat strict. They say that Filipinos tend to be strict, which also has some advantages. Perhaps, they also mention it as an advantage because they see the advantage that even though we are strict, we are diligent workers who stay in the classroom even after working hours are over. That’s what I learned when I was in college, especially when I was doing Student Teaching. I learned how to handle classroom management, especially when I became a Secondary Student Teacher. You

cannot afford to be weak; you need to be ready before entering the school during that time.”
 [Participant 07]

Higher education institutions serve as an important avenue in preparing graduates with the skills and knowledge needed to engage in a globalized world (Abulibdeh et al., 2024). Universities do not only serve as centers for intellectual debate but also for national and global progress by equipping students with competencies necessary for cross-cultural and transnational interactions (Ul Hassan et al., 2025). As economic and social structures become increasingly shaped by globalization, tertiary education institutions must recognize their role in preparing students for professions that demand adaptability, intercultural communication, and transnational collaboration (Suntharalingam, 2025). However, warranting that higher education remains relevant in an increasingly interconnected world requires a strong understanding of national contexts that influence academic discourse and the total learner experience.

The internationalization of universities has brought numerous changes to the academic environment, particularly in the mobility of students and faculty (Gao & Liu, 2023). Most universities now operate in a global work environment, where professionals from diverse backgrounds interact daily (Aithal et al., 2024). While this transformation offers opportunities for cross-cultural learning and communication, it also presents challenges, particularly for academic staff who may not have received adequate training in intercultural communication and professional engagement with international students (Bakhov et al., 2024). In many parts of the world, there is a clear lack of systematic training for university instructors, leaving them unprepared to teach in multicultural classrooms (Koukoulidis et al., 2024). Looking closely at these challenges requires institutions to implement measures that improve educators' ability to adapt and succeed in various learning environments.

However, higher education institutions need to work with a clear direction while internationalizing (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). Unintentional or unplanned internationalization may result in poor academic expectations, cultural misunderstandings, and wasteful collaborations (Allardice et al., 2025). Through properly designed internationalization programs, universities can set norms and standards that enhance learning experiences faced by students and faculty (Yang & Zhong, 2024). Thus, universities can maximize this benefit by taking advantage of online resources to take intercultural education to new heights, developing programs for organized exchanges, or establishing best practices to engage the global community through digital platforms that facilitate worldwide dialogue (Rosienkiewicz et al., 2024). Universities must apply reforms in internationalization for meaningful contributions to the lives of their students and their subsequent academic and professional growth.

Trained to professional competence

The participants are adamant that their training has given them the skills and knowledge to teach well. They feel well-prepared, and some even think they have an edge over their foreign counterparts. With the confidence gained from rigorous training that exposed them to various learning experiences—enhancing their creativity, planning, and classroom management abilities—they are now examining the more subtle aspects of teaching and mastering the challenges of a foreign educational setting. Despite the hurdles they encounter, their preparedness gives them the adaptability and professionalism to cope with any situation.

Participants took the liberty to participate actively in a change process in their respective institutions, improving them. They developed these new ideas because of the confidence their training gave them. The sense of being empowered encouraged them to engage proactively in lectures on curriculum development, teaching approaches, and student engagement. Although they recognize some challenges in being non-native speakers or foreign educators, they consider their qualifications and training sufficient to mitigate these challenges and help them perform to the best of their abilities. Their

intent to innovate and share best practices implies their adaptability and commitment to career development, thus validating the training they have received. Two participants explained:

“In the course Principles of Teaching, I learned valuable skills in Classroom Management, which proved particularly helpful when dealing with a class of non-Filipino students. Effective lesson planning is important in such situations, as without it, the class can quickly become chaotic. This knowledge proved extremely advantageous when working with my eight American colleagues. While they were able to explain concepts, they struggled to teach them effectively due to a lack of focus on lesson planning. As education graduates, we are highly adaptable to different learning environments, but for native English speakers like my American colleagues, adapting to new environments takes more time and effort. We, on the other hand, are always ready to take on new challenges, having a solid foundation in learning and teaching. This gives us a significant edge in any learning or teaching environment, something that our American counterparts lack.” [Participant 03]

During my teaching career, I learned that two important skills are essential for conducting successful classes. Firstly, it's essential to have a well-planned lesson, which I learned well in BPSU College of Education. Each year, we had to conduct an open class where parents were invited to attend. To ensure the class was effective, we needed to have a strong lesson plan to guide us from the beginning to the end of the lesson. Secondly, it's important to have strong classroom management skills. The opening and closing of the class are also important. To start the class, you should introduce the lesson, and then proceed with the learning activities. Finally, you must not forget to evaluate the students' performance and recall what was learned from the opening of the class. The opening should be connected to the closing part of your class, and a review is very important. I also had to coach other teachers, I felt like their boss, but I still felt superior because of my skills. [Participant 09]

Developing a well-structured approach to training teachers, university staff, and students in a foreign language is essential for improving their ability to teach and learn effectively in English (Saldo et al., 2025). This involves more than just language proficiency; it requires building scientific and methodological competencies that support meaningful engagement in an academic setting (Mouboua et al., 2024). A strong foundation in these areas helps educators communicate complex ideas with clarity, facilitates knowledge-sharing across disciplines, and prepares students to participate in discussions that extend beyond local perspectives (Ayodele & Zhou, 2024). Without a clear and effective training strategy, the ability of universities to integrate into the global academic community may be limited.

This strategy can be further strengthened by creating a cross-cultural learning environment where students and teachers interact through open communication and mutual respect (Eden et al., 2024). When universities provide opportunities for intercultural exchange, they help students and educators build the confidence and flexibility needed to engage with diverse perspectives (Latif et al., 2025). Online platforms and e-learning technologies also play a key role by offering accessible spaces for international dialogue and collaboration. These programs not only enhance the overall quality of education but also promote a more inclusive and diverse academic environment—one where excellence is achieved alongside a deep respect for cultural differences (Matiso, 2024).

Despite these benefits, there remains a need for universities to pay closer attention to how these initiatives are implemented (Xu & Boudouaia, 2023). While many institutions recognize the importance of internationalization, not all have established clear strategies for supporting teachers and students in this transition (Brück-Hübner et al., 2024). Investing in well-designed training programs and structured support systems ensures that educators are not only prepared to teach in English but are also equipped to develop meaningful learning experiences for their students (Diab & Green, 2024). By strengthening these efforts, universities can improve their local and global connections, developing their academic

communities to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

Continuous learning

Even with the solid training they have received, participants recognize that learning does not stop once they enter the workforce. They continue to develop their skills through professional training, hands-on experience, and self-directed learning. Many rely on mentors to guide them through the challenges of working in a foreign country, particularly when it comes to teaching strategies and adapting to different educational systems. The need for continuous learning is not just about professional growth but also about building confidence and resilience in a new environment.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle in this case is linguistic barriers, especially in countries where the English language is not common and widely spoken. Many had to find a way in learning the local language on their own, just to conduct their daily life and communicate correctly with their students and colleagues. It requires much time, effort, and hard work on the chosen language since it is a necessary tool for every adjustment personally and professionally. Nevertheless, alumni teaching overseas have adapted the way by getting assistance from a mentor, collaborating with co-workers, or individually continuing studies to fill in the gap. Their experiences describe that apart from formal training, asking for help and showing independence in self-study are equally important for succeeding in this kind of working environment.

"The only good thing about the two schools I went to is that the principal/head is also a foreigner. This makes it easy to communicate, which is that we can communicate quickly with individuals from the United States or the United Kingdom, as opposed to communication with natives, which is very difficult." [Participant 013]

"So, in my experience, I've found that always looking for new knowledge and skills has been very valuable. For example, when I'm at work, I make it a point to actively engage in training sessions and learn from my experiences on the job. Outside of work, I'm always trying new interests and challenging myself to learn new things, whether it's through reading, online courses, or trying out different ways to learn. Additionally, it has been very valuable to seek advice and guidance from people who have more experience or expertise in areas I want to learn more about." [Participant 02]

To support global learning, universities need to create an environment that welcomes international perspectives and adapts to changing educational and professional demands (Aithal et al., 2024). This goes beyond adding international content to courses—it requires a shift in how faculty, students, and administrators see knowledge and its role in society (Suntharalingam, 2025). Schools must embrace inclusive learning experiences to help students develop adaptability, intercultural communication, and teamwork across borders (Bakhov et al., 2024). By doing so, graduates will not only be knowledgeable but also ready to contribute in meaningful ways, locally and internationally.

One way universities have done this is through programs that promote global engagement, such as faculty and student exchanges, international conferences, and collaborative research projects. These experiences allow faculty to bring fresh insights back to their institutions and give students exposure to different cultures and ideas. Virtual learning and joint projects with international peers also help students gain a broader perspective, making them more prepared for the realities of a global workforce (Qing & Jing, 2024).

Beyond exchange programs, internationalization strengthens a university's reputation and expands opportunities for students and faculty (Cherniavska et al., 2023). Building strong partnerships with institutions abroad, supporting international students, and developing global research

collaborations create lasting benefits (Ciumacenco, 2024). Universities that actively pursue these efforts not only enhance their academic standing but also provide students with valuable connections and experiences that prepare them for a world where cross-cultural understanding and collaboration are essential.

Challenge of the Language barrier

Many alumni who have gone abroad to teach English have encountered challenges they did not expect. While their training prepared them in terms of lesson planning and classroom management, the reality of teaching students with almost no English vocabulary was more difficult than anticipated. They initially struggled to bridge the language gap, realizing that their usual teaching methods were not always effective. To manage this, some relied on translators—whether fellow teachers or students who had a better grasp of English—to help facilitate lessons. However, this was only a temporary fix, as relying on others for communication was not sustainable in the long run.

Over time, these teachers had to find ways to adapt. Many turned to self-learning to acquire the local language, using various resources such as online courses, language exchange with colleagues, and daily interactions with the community. Learning even basic words and phrases made a significant difference, allowing them to connect better with their students and improve classroom engagement. While it was a challenging process, many found that making the effort to understand the local language not only helped in teaching but also in adjusting to life abroad. This experience reinforced the idea that teaching in a foreign country is not just about imparting knowledge but also about continuously learning and adapting to new environments.

"I guess my first six months teaching English here in Japan were the most challenging times I've experienced. But I've managed to adjust now. You see, I arrived here at the start of the second semester, so I think the students still needed time to adapt to my teaching style and accent. They were probably used to the accent of their previous foreign teacher. Also, since I do pair teaching with a Japanese English teacher, I had to focus on building a good relationship with them first before I could establish one with my students." [Participant 02]

"In many international schools, especially when the teacher is from a different country, like me teaching here in Vietnam, having a teaching assistant who can translate is really important. See, they help bridge the language gap between me and the students. So, if there's any confusion or if the students need something explained in their native language, the teaching assistant is there to help out. It just makes the whole teaching and learning process a lot smoother and more effective." [Participant 07]

Advancing internationalization in education plays an important role in contributing to SDG 4—Quality Education—by promoting global citizenship and developing inclusive learning environments. One way to achieve this is through transformative approaches that extend beyond traditional classroom settings. Outreach projects that connect universities with local and international communities help create meaningful learning experiences that prepare students for a globally interconnected world (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). Integrating international perspectives into curricula supports students' awareness regarding different cultures and global challenges, making education more relevant in a post-pandemic society (Wu, 2024). These efforts support sustainable development by equipping learners with the skills needed to engage in cross-cultural collaboration and address global issues effectively (Langat, 2024).

To support these initiatives, institutions must invest in initiatives that enhance exposure for students and instructors to international learning experiences. Learning foreign languages and virtual exchange programs can improve students' involvement in exposure to various cultures and perspectives, whether or not students can study abroad (Brück-Hübner et al., 2024). Not only do these initiatives

develops language capacity, but also insight into cultural differences, such that they promote cultural openness and adaptability (Gao & Liu, 2023). Universities must create teacher education environment that exposes them to various cultural backgrounds for their teaching skills be developed for different educational setting (Eden et al., 2024).

In addition, it is equally important to address existing gaps in training, particularly in language skills and intercultural competencies (Karimova et al., 2024). Many educators and students struggle with effectively teaching in international academic settings due to a lack of preparation in these areas. Approaches such as Internationalization at Campus and Intercultural Communication training can provide practical solutions by having more structured learning experiences within the university environment. These strategies help students and faculty build the confidence to engage in diverse educational settings to reinforce internationalization efforts and come up with meaningful and valuable progress in the quality of education.

Lack of intentionality

Many students noticed aspects of internationalization in their undergraduate experience, but they often weren't sure if those experiences truly counted. This uncertainty came not just from unfamiliarity with the term but also from the lack of clear efforts to integrate internationalization into the College of Education curriculum. Some students linked it to teaching English as a Foreign Language, though this perspective was mostly limited to English majors. Others recalled brief discussions on globalization and multicultural education, but these topics made up only a small part of their coursework. Because of this, many students felt that internationalization wasn't something they actively engaged with—it was more of an afterthought than a core part of their education.

"When I heard the word Internationalization, I needed to think twice and ask, where did I learn this? I cannot exactly remember from whom, but then we had different activities where internationalization seemed to be present. Then when you come to think of it, we sort of grasped it in Principles of Teaching. It was in Principles of Teaching in Language and Learning and Teaching, but the exact word "Internationalization" wasn't there, so it comes with concepts like Social Cultural Learning. Then I still remember the Cross-Linguistic Influence, like the Learner Language." [Participant 014]

"The good thing is that our college world history class covers Asian history, exposing us to different cultures and traditions. This prepares us so that when we encounter these cultures, we're not caught off guard or surprised by their customs. Instead, we already have an understanding that many aspects are similar to the Philippines, with differences mainly in religion. This subject helps us avoid culture shock and gives us insight into various countries." [Participant 003]

For internationalization to have a real impact, it needs to be intentionally woven into teacher education programs rather than treated as a passing topic (Wagner & Dietrich, 2024). Students should have opportunities to explore global perspectives, regardless of their major (Gao & Liu, 2023). This could mean working on projects with international classmates, studying different education systems, or examining how culture shapes teaching and learning (Suntharalingam, 2025). When these experiences are made part of everyday learning, students learn and apply concepts in education beyond their borders (Wimpenny et al., 2024). More than just learning about different approaches, they develop the confidence and adaptability to teach in inclusive classrooms and connect with students from various backgrounds.

In this way, universities should focus their training on connected learning, self-reflection, and a wider vision of the world. However, most importantly, learning for diversity and internationality must be reflected in the policies of the school, the development of faculty, and extracurricular programs that

develop global awareness in students (Wagner & Dietrich, 2024). All these would therefore create an environment within which learning for future teachers would be facilitated in anticipating a better life in an interconnected world.

Discussion

This study explores the stories of Filipino graduates who are working as teachers abroad—individuals who have ventured out from their home country to meet the complexity of teaching in different cultures and institutional settings. Behind this study lies the inquiry into not just geographical mobility but professional and personal migration of teachers as they transition to new systems, establish new networks, and develop. Through their narratives, this study captures in detail the experience of teaching in a foreign environment, the gains and challenges in this journey.

Participants' stories shed light on their experiences with cultural differences ranging from subtle to deep. They reported classrooms organized in unfamiliar ways, met peers who utilized different learning strategies and were confronted with educational systems with expectations requiring swift adaptation, frequently without official assistance. Adjustments thus became a proximal necessity and not an option. Much of their learning came not from preparatory materials or orientations before leaving but from the process of day-to-day instruction itself—learning by experimentation, rebuilding trust, and joining new professional networks. The findings suggest that preparation is worthwhile, but the transformative learning that guides global educators occurs to a great degree *in situ* and frequently in relative solitude.

The study also explored participants' preparedness and challenges in transitioning to international teaching professions. Although participants were found to have necessary professional and interpersonal competencies—such as flexibility, resilience, innovation, and commitment—they also faced considerable challenges. These were knowledge gaps in language as well as insufficient preparation during their undergraduate courses for international teaching settings. Although institutions offered extensive academic preparation, there was no specialist support or opportunities for international exposure. This is evidence of a wide gap between international teaching needs and the preparatory support available.

Despite these challenges, the participants reported not only survival but thriving, driven by intrinsic motivation and passion for learning. Their success was not only a function of their credentials but also largely due to interpersonal skills like intercultural communication, problem-solving in high-stakes situations, and grit in the unknown. These findings align with the findings of Wu (2024) and Kaspersen and Gabriel (2024), illustrating the importance of combining technical competencies with human qualities—effort, adaptability, and emotional intelligence—to succeed in international educational settings. The participants' experiences confirm the idea that while credentials may open doors, it is mostly character and attitude that support long-term success.

Notably, previous studies (Gao and Liu, 2023) have identified linguistic difficulties as the key barriers, but the current study reveals a more nuanced picture. Language challenges existed but were usually accompanied by systemic challenges, such as the absence of adequate institutional support, the absence of adequate pre-departure training, and unclear avenues to global opportunities. In addition, grit on the part of individuals proved to be a determining factor in transcending such challenges, indicating that adequate attitudes would reduce much of the struggle.

The implications of these findings are valuable to teacher education programs in the Philippines and beyond. International classroom teacher preparation needs to be recognized as a core component of teacher preparation and not an optional add-on. The findings necessitate institutions to implement holistic support mechanisms that include continuous language development, meaningful intercultural experiences, and articulated internationalization strategies.

Interestingly, the study also identifies the human side of teaching overseas. Along with knowledge competencies, what sustained participants was their openness to continued learning, adaptability to new settings, and resilience to build from afar. Preparing future globally connected teachers includes providing tools and developing purpose, empathy, and a sense of belonging in various international education settings.

Among the dominant themes was the invaluable role of informal mentorship and personal networks as support instruments in times of transition. In environments where there was a weak institutional framework, participants were heavily reliant on interactions with experienced colleagues, and peers, as well as internet forums for advice, inspiration, and technical inputs. These informal support instruments filled institutional gaps, and this indicates the need for more organized counseling in the higher education sector.

Whereas this illustrates the agency of the actors, it also betrays systemic inadequacies in internationalization driven by universities. Institutionally recorded commitment to global engagement notwithstanding, participants interpreted these as symbolic gestures and not as pedagogical interventions within the university. This evidence supports De Wit and Altbach's (2021) criticisms that internationalization is superficial where there is no coherent policy, adequate funding, and long-term strategic planning. For these educators, their global engagement was done despite, and not because of, institutional readiness.

The findings therefore call for universities to engage in a serious re-examination and strengthening of their internationalization activities, especially in the area of teacher education. The respondents repeatedly reported a lack of formal international experiences and unclear routes to global readiness as undergraduates. Correcting this curricular and programmatic shortcoming is needed to avoid putting future teachers at a disadvantage. Internationalization needs to move beyond discrete activities—such as student exchanges or visiting lectures—and become a deliberate, intentional, and sustained part of teacher education. Particular actions could involve individualized language skills training, intercultural communication workshops, and international practicum placements.

Despite gaps, participants exhibited resilience, resourcefulness, and a proactive learning orientation—skills necessary for dealing with complex global teaching conditions. Most effectively transitioned to new, unfamiliar administrative systems, pedagogical requirements, and cross-cultural communication needs without prior training in these domains. Such skills, though developed under conditions of stress, are exactly those sought in global educational settings.

Finally, the current study acknowledges its limitations. The conclusions are based on a sample of successful Filipino graduates who secured international teaching posts and might not represent more extensive groups of experiences, especially those who experienced more adversity. Furthermore, the research did not compare data by field of study or type of institution, which could influence judgments of preparation. Further studies, including longitudinal and comparative designs, are needed to achieve a fuller and richer understanding of the internationalization outcomes.

Thus, the Filipino alumni experiences reinforce the need for clear, explicit, and aligned higher education internationalization plans. The results cast a dissonance between institutional intent and action, and without intentional curricular integration and institutional backing, internationalization will continue to remain a student/faculty initiative rather than being equally facilitated by universities. It takes not only mastery of content but also the development of intercultural awareness, communication competence, and resilience to thrive in diverse educational environments to prepare globally competent teachers. The data therefore call for universities to critically reevaluate and strengthen their internationalization initiatives, especially in teacher education. Participants consistently reported limited formal international opportunities and unclear pathways to global readiness during their undergraduate

studies. Addressing this curricular and programmatic gap is important to avoid disadvantaging future cohorts. Internationalization should move beyond isolated activities—such as student exchanges or guest lectures—to become a systemic, intentional, and sustained feature of teacher education. Practical measures may include contextualized language proficiency training, intercultural communication workshops, and international practicum placements.

Conclusion

To summarize the analysis, our investigation of various aspects of internationalization in education has yielded valuable insights:

1. The findings of this study reveal that students can significantly gain from involvement in exchange programs and involvement in other internationalization activities. While the preliminary perceptions of these kinds of programs appear to be shallow, most participants agree that these kinds of experiences have motivated them and created effective networking opportunities. Such relationships translate into employment opportunities overseas, and thus significant benefit is gained from exposure to foreign visitors and internationalization programs. Moreover, such findings indicate the necessity of creating sound social skills among students, particularly through experience gained through foreign collaborative activities.
2. One of the important insights of this research is with regard to the scope of Filipino English teachers' perceptions in different countries. In Cambodia, being Filipino is an advantage because employers specifically look for native speakers or Filipinos to fill teaching positions. In Korea, however, the same trait is a disadvantage with native English speakers. Despite this difficulty, Filipino teachers continue to try to overcome these disadvantages with professional skills and work ethics like being flexible and steadfast.
3. Foreign alumni teachers exude a strong confidence in the sufficiency of their training and professional competencies, and they are superior to their foreign counterparts. The comprehensive training programs and diverse educational exposures equipped them with a strong set of competencies, such as enhanced creativity, efficient planning, and effective classroom management. Furthermore, the confidence gained from this training enables international teachers to acclimatize to foreign environments and bring new concepts for improvement, hence proving their preparedness to excel in international education settings.
4. Even with the impression that their undergraduate education well prepared them, the alumni also saw the need for skill development and adult learning. In adapting, they prefer to seek guidance from mentors, e.g., academic personnel, particularly when faced with the challenges of working globally. These initiatives are expressed in different forms, e.g., self-directed study, professional development courses, and experiential learning, which demonstrate a proactive approach to becoming better teachers and being able to adapt in multicultural settings.
5. Language barriers is one common challenge of the teacher education alumni working overseas, particularly within their classrooms, due to students' minimal English proficiency, the language which is mostly utilized by Filipino teachers abroad. To address this, they need local language translators or teaching assistants as translators which hampers easy communication with students. Despite this, they acknowledge that learning the local language of the country where they are teaching is necessary, thus this should be part of the long-term adjustments for effectively teaching their students.
6. The findings indicate a notable gap in the intentional incorporation of internationalization within the College of Education curricula. While students identify some linkages to internationalization in their undergraduate experiences, there is uncertainty regarding whether these experiences align with the concept. This lack of clarity suggests a need for a more deliberate approach to integrating internationalization initiatives into the curriculum. Moreover, the predominant focus on English language teaching, with limited exposure to broader concepts such as globalization

and multicultural education, requires a more comprehensive and intentional approach to internationalization within teacher education programs.

Recommendations

To improve internationalization in teacher education programs, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. It is necessary to expand access to international exchange and language training opportunities to nurture global perspectives among future teachers. This is equally important as it can increase the availability and accessibility of international exchange programs for students. In the Philippines, partnerships with neighboring ASEAN countries and established teacher mobility programs, such as the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education e (SEAMEO) initiatives, can be strengthened to provide more avenues for student exchanges. Additionally, prioritizing language training that addresses specific professional contexts—such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or introductory courses in regional languages like Bahasa Indonesia, Korean, Japanese or Thai—would better prepare Filipino educators to teach effectively in diverse linguistic environments. Internationally, universities could emulate models like Erasmus+ (Europe) or the JET Programme (Japan) to expose students to a broader spectrum of teaching practices and cultural norms.
2. There is a need to enhance professional development through targeted training and mentorship by developing comprehensive professional development programs that enhance intercultural competence, and adaptability to inclusive educational settings. For instance, Philippine Teacher Education Institutions can offer elective courses in special education, culturally responsive pedagogy, and conflict-sensitive teaching practices. The mentorship programs can link the alumni teaching overseas to the pre-service teachers taking their program at the university. In this way, alumni overseas can serve as career guides, and peer coaches, while sharing their narratives about challenges and strategies for success. Internationally, partnerships could be modeled after initiatives like the Australian Mobility Awards, which pair returning scholars with aspiring global educators.
3. It is also valuable to integrate multicultural education into the teacher education programs, through this cultural sensitivity, awareness, and inclusivity among pre-service teachers can be nurtured. and Nurture Global Collaborations. TEIs in the Philippines can integrate courses such as global citizenship education (GCED) that align with UNESCO standards, or modules on Indigenous knowledge systems to balance local and global understandings. Moreover, partnerships with international educational institutions such as through memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreements for faculty and student exchanges, joint conferences, or shared curriculum development can improve academic collaboration and cultural exchange. Success collaborations of the University of Tsukuba in Japan and the National Institute of Education in Singapore can serve as benchmarks.
4. Teacher Education Institutions can formulate a strategic and intentional internationalization plan that will systematize the efforts in this area. This plan will define clear goals, objectives, and actionable steps. For the Philippines, this could involve setting specific targets for outbound and inbound mobility, curriculum internationalization benchmarks, and global partnership development. Internationally, alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) can guide these strategies, to ensure that global perspectives are integrated across all aspects of teacher preparation and professional development.
5. A call for promoting lifelong learning is suggested, which can be done by supporting faculty and students in continuous engagement in international conferences, workshops, and seminars. Philippine universities could, for instance, allocate travel grants or create "internationalization funds" that prioritize sending educators to key education conferences

like AERA (American Educational Research Association) or the International Conference on Teacher Education. Lastly, investing in research initiatives on internationalization—such as comparative studies on teacher mobility, best practices in multicultural education, or innovative teaching models in multilingual settings can inform local policy and contribute to global academic conversations.

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