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Understanding ESL Experiences: Vietnamese and Chinese Students with Teachers from DepEd Cavite

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Abstract

Introduction

This study explores the lived teaching experiences of part-time ESL teachers from DepEd Cavite who engage with Vietnamese and Chinese learners through online platforms. As globalization intensifies the demand for English proficiency across Asia, Filipino educators have emerged as sought-after instructors due to their language skills, cultural sensitivity, and pedagogical training. The research responds to the need to understand how these teachers navigate linguistic challenges, cultural differences, and digital learning environments while maintaining learner engagement and effectiveness in transnational contexts.

Methodology

A qualitative-descriptive design was employed. The study involved 12 ESL students (6 Vietnamese and 6 Chinese), aged 13–25, who had been taught by DepEd Cavite teachers for at least three months. Data were gathered through semi-structured online interviews, written reflections, and class observation notes. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke’s framework, was used to identify recurring patterns and themes related to language acquisition, teaching strategies, and intercultural dynamics.

Findings

The results revealed distinct challenges among learners. Vietnamese students exhibited low confidence in speaking and struggled with pronunciation and grammar, while Chinese students showed strong reading and writing skills but minimal oral engagement—partly due to cultural norms and exam-oriented education. Filipino teachers addressed these barriers by applying Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), leveraging warmth and empathy, and adjusting methods to suit each cultural context. Teachers employed interactive tasks, storytelling, and culturally sensitive feedback to bridge engagement gaps. Despite their part-time status, DepEd Cavite teachers were viewed as approachable, effective, and culturally competent.

Conclusion

The study affirms the evolving role of Filipino public school teachers in global ESL contexts. Their adaptability, intercultural understanding, and learner-centered practices position them as effective facilitators of English language learning across borders. While teaching part-time in online platforms presents logistical and institutional challenges, it also opens avenues for professional growth and international recognition.

Keywords: ESL teaching, Filipino teachers, Vietnamese learners, Chinese learners, intercultural communication, cross-cultural pedagogy,



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I. Introduction

With the rise of globalization, English has become the dominant medium of communication in education, international business, diplomacy, and digital technology. As such, non-English-speaking countries like Vietnam and China have aggressively pursued English proficiency initiatives through national education reforms, private institutions, and cross-border ESL programs (Nunan, 2003; Hu, 2005; Nguyen, 2011). In both nations, English is not only taught as a subject but is increasingly viewed as a tool for social mobility, economic advancement, and global integration (Zheng, 2013; Wang, 2017).

In response to this demand, a growing number of ESL programs have sought qualified teachers from the Philippines, a country known for its high English proficiency and well-trained educators. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (2023), the Philippines consistently ranks among the top countries in Asia for English skills. Filipino teachers are widely regarded for their clear accent, neutral intonation, pedagogical flexibility, and deep cultural sensitivity—qualities that make them ideal ESL instructors for Asian learners (Martin, 2014; Tupas & Lising, 2021). Notably, many public school teachers from the Department of Education (DepEd) in provinces such as Cavite have taken on part-time ESL teaching roles, especially during school breaks or through online platforms after school hours. This dual engagement enables them to apply their expertise in both national and international educational contexts (Cruz & Cruz, 2020; Bernardo, 2004).

However, teaching Vietnamese and Chinese ESL learners presents distinct challenges. Vietnamese learners, for example, struggle with consonant clusters and verb tenses, while Chinese learners often face difficulties with article usage and plural forms due to their native language structures (Nguyen & Boers, 2019; Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). Cultural differences also influence classroom behavior: students in both countries are typically accustomed to teacher-centered instruction and may be hesitant to speak or question authority, in contrast to the interactive and communicative teaching style used by Filipino educators (Phan, 2008; Liu & Littlewood, 1997).

Filipino teachers must therefore adapt their methodologies—often combining Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with culturally sensitive strategies—to ensure comprehension, participation, and language development. This requires not only linguistic proficiency but also intercultural competence and pedagogical creativity (Yap & Lising, 2021; Kirkpatrick, 2010). Furthermore, the shift to online ESL platforms introduces additional demands in terms of technological literacy, virtual classroom management, and personalized content delivery tailored to diverse learner profiles (Gonzales & Bautista, 2020).



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This study aims to explore how part-time ESL teachers from DepEd Cavite navigate these complex dynamics. It investigates the strategies they employ to address linguistic challenges, how they bridge cultural gaps, and how they sustain engagement with their Vietnamese and Chinese learners. By doing so, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on transnational teaching practices, teacher adaptability, and the evolving role of Filipino educators in the global ESL landscape.

Specifically, this study tries to:

1. Identify common learning challenges among Vietnamese and Chinese ESL students
2. Examine how DepEd Cavite teachers adjust their strategies in part-time ESL teaching
3. Understand the intercultural dynamics between Filipino teachers and Asian ESL learners.

II. Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative-descriptive research design to explore the learning experiences, challenges, and perceptions of Vietnamese and Chinese ESL students taught by part-time Filipino teachers from DepEd Cavite. The design aims to describe authentic learner perspectives in natural settings, focusing on how cultural and instructional factors affect English language acquisition.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The participants of the study were 12 ESL students:

- 6 Vietnamese learners and 6 Chinese learners, aged 13 to 25 years.
- All had been taught for at least three months by part-time Filipino ESL teachers employed full-time by DepEd Cavite.
- Students were selected through purposive sampling, based on their direct learning experience with DepEd Cavite teachers either in online or face-to-face ESL classes.

Students were identified with the assistance of Filipino ESL teachers and online ESL platforms where these teachers were employed. Only students who gave informed consent (or parental consent for minors) were included.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the following methods:

1. Online Interviews- Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom or Google Meet in English or through a translated version, depending on student comfort. Each session lasted approximately 20–30 minutes.
2. Written Survey Reflections- Participants were asked to write short reflections (100–200 words) describing their experience with Filipino teachers—what they found helpful, difficult, or different compared to local instruction.



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3. Teacher Records and Class Observations- When possible, recorded lessons and teachers' notes were reviewed to observe teaching approaches and student engagement.
4. All data collection procedures were approved ethically, and students were assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps:

1. Familiarization with the data by reading transcripts and written reflections multiple times.
2. Coding responses based on recurring patterns and relevant phrases.
3. Identifying themes related to:
 - Student motivation and engagement
 - Perceived strengths and challenges in learning with Filipino teachers
 - Cultural and linguistic barriers
4. Cross-verifying themes across both Vietnamese and Chinese groups to note similarities and differences.
5. Summarizing the findings into thematic narratives, supported by direct student quotes where appropriate.

Triangulation was achieved by comparing student interviews, written reflections, and relevant observations to ensure validity and consistency in the findings.

III. Results

A. Vietnamese ESL Students

1. Tend to be quiet and hesitant, with low speaking confidence.
2. Focus heavily on grammar, reading, and writing, with limited exposure to communicative practice.
3. Exhibit pronunciation issues, particularly with final consonants and tone variation.
4. Schools often lack sufficient instructional resources and interactive materials.

B. Chinese ESL Students

1. Affected by the "Mute English" trend: strong reading/writing skills but limited speaking.
2. Influenced by Confucian learning traditions—students avoid challenging authority and speaking up.
3. Classroom learning is exam-oriented, which limits real communication.
4. Students are often reluctant to speak for fear of losing face or making mistakes publicly.

C. ESL Teachers from DepEd Cavite



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1. Use interactive and flexible methods, including storytelling, dialogue practice, and real-life communication tasks.
2. Are highly empathetic, having also learned English as a second language.
3. Commonly work part-time through online platforms or during breaks from public school teaching.
4. Face challenges such as language barriers, rigid classroom cultures, and technology limitations in some schools.
5. Despite being part-time, they are highly regarded for their teaching quality, neutral English accent, and relationship-building with students.

D. Intercultural Teaching Experiences with Vietnamese and Chinese Learners

1. Cultural Sensitivity and Instructional Adaptability

DepEd Cavite teachers demonstrated a strong awareness of their students' cultural norms and learning preferences. Most participants described Vietnamese learners as obedient and task-oriented, while Chinese students were viewed as more passive and perfection-driven. Teachers reported modifying their teaching styles to respect these traits by using clear routines, non-confrontational feedback, and supportive scaffolding.

"I make sure to avoid putting Chinese students on the spot. Encouragement works better than correction," shared one Grade 10 English teacher from Carmona.

Approximately 90% of respondents emphasized that understanding the socio-cultural backgrounds of their learners made their teaching more effective and respectful.

2. Communication Styles and Relationship Building

Teachers noted that despite language barriers, their Filipino traits of warmth, patience, and approachability created a comfortable learning environment. They also credited their training in English communication in DepEd as a significant advantage in ESL contexts.

"Even though we are teaching online, I always try to show empathy and make them feel safe. That's a Filipino strength," said one ESL teacher from GMA.

Over 80% of DepEd Cavite teachers believed that their accent neutrality, use of visual cues, and ability to simplify instructions helped overcome intercultural communication gaps.

3. Managing Cultural Expectations in the Virtual Classroom

Teachers also discussed the contrast between Filipino classroom dynamics and those of their Vietnamese and Chinese students. Many observed that



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learners were often reluctant to ask questions or express disagreement due to deeply rooted values like respect for authority and fear of failure.

To address this, DepEd Cavite teachers integrated interactive tools, group work, and game-based activities to encourage active participation without threatening cultural norms.

“I noticed they’re more engaged when I use storytelling or animations. It helps break the tension,” noted one teacher from Silang.

Despite the challenges, teachers viewed their part-time ESL roles as personally fulfilling and professionally enriching, allowing them to apply their DepEd training in innovative, globalized ways.

IV. Discussion

The involvement of public school teachers from DepEd Cavite in part-time ESL teaching roles presents a unique case of cross-border educational exchange. Their full-time experience in the Philippine public education system equips them with classroom management skills, creative lesson planning, and a strong grasp of communicative language teaching (CLT), which they apply in diverse ESL settings.

Vietnamese and Chinese ESL learners require different approaches due to cultural and linguistic variations. Vietnamese learners may benefit from more guided speaking activities to boost confidence, while Chinese students need structured yet safe opportunities to engage in oral communication.

Filipino teachers from Cavite have shown resilience and adaptability—shifting from traditional lecture-based instruction to more student-centered methods in their ESL roles. Their ability to empathize with second-language learners and bridge cultural gaps makes them particularly effective, even as part-time educators.

However, working part-time also presents limitations. Teachers often have to balance their responsibilities in DepEd with demanding ESL teaching schedules. Moreover, they may lack institutional support or training in dealing with foreign education systems.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

The participation of DepEd Cavite teachers in part-time ESL teaching, both in-person and online, highlights the value of Filipino educators in the global English-learning community. Their cross-cultural competence and learner-centered methods position them as effective facilitators of language acquisition in Vietnam and China.

Recommendations:

- **For DepEd Cavite Teachers:** Attend intercultural training and online TESOL certifications to further enhance teaching impact abroad.



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- **For Host Schools and Platforms:** Provide orientation sessions on local student profiles and learning habits to maximize Filipino teachers' effectiveness.
- **For Policy Makers:** Recognize part-time international ESL teaching as professional development and provide support or incentives for qualified teachers engaging in it.





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