

# Filipino Special Education Teachers' Adjustment in Teaching at South Carolina

Lemuel Anthony A. Mosquito., Therese June V. Aranas

Department of Special Education, University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

The United States of America is facing a shortage of SPED teachers, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2022), and they need Filipino SPED teachers to close this demand gap. The growing need for skilled teachers in U.S. schools has resulted in a significant influx of international teachers, particularly from the Philippines, to mitigate teacher shortages. Filipino SPED teachers who have decided to teach in South Carolina, USA, found themselves exposed to bigger cultural and personal changes as they transitioned to new social and educational contexts and practical adaptations into new classroom management and teaching methods. Thus, Filipino SPED teachers face the challenge of integrating their professional experiences as they adapt to US classrooms. This study aimed to examine how Filipino SPED teachers in South Carolina adapt their classroom management techniques and teaching methods to meet the students' needs in South Carolina

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological technique based on Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology and recruited six Filipino special education teachers to participate in interviews. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, and the findings of the study revealed that the classroom management techniques and teaching methods applied were similar in both U.S. and Philippine Classrooms. However, the participants noticed a contrast in culture and student behavior, in the availability and access to teaching and learning resources and technology, in a shift in teaching approach from teacher-centered to student-centered, and in better admin and peer support in the U.S. The findings also highlighted the importance of adaptability in survival and professional success, a demand for continuous learning, and a need for active collaboration and mentorship to support the learning process of the Filipino special education teachers.

The findings of this study serve as a basis for school districts and policymakers to develop programs that would better equip Filipino special education teachers before they teach in U.S. Classrooms.

**Keywords:** Filipino special education teachers, special education, classroom management techniques, teaching methods

## INTRODUCTION

The experiences of Filipino special education (SPED) teachers, who are currently teaching in South Carolina, expose them to deeper cultural and personal changes as they adapt to new social and educational contexts, in addition to practical adaptations to new classroom management and teaching methods. It must be noted that the students in South Carolina come from a diverse cultural and linguistic background, including Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/ Alaskan native, and other races (US Department of Education, 2019; Ostendorf & Choic, 2017). The richness of cultural and linguistic diversity in the student population creates disparity between teachers and students (Salas & López, 2008). Furthermore, they have to deal with the administrative needs particular to American schools, manage the intricacies of classroom management, and satisfy the various expectations of parents and students. It can present some difficulties for Filipino SPED teachers, despite their training and commitment (Santos & Lee, 2022). These difficulties frequently necessitate the use of strong resilience and adaptation abilities as they navigate this new pedagogical landscape. Nonetheless, their experiences give them a global perspective, making them cultural ambassadors (Gamad et al., 2024).

Thus, the Filipino SPED teachers who were sent to teach in the USA face the challenge of having to integrate their professional experiences as they navigated and adapted to the US classrooms. It is important to recognize that they have to deal with culture shock and educational encounters as they delve into the US education system, deal with changes in teacher support and personal time, and make plans for the future (Macapagong, Maguate, & Geroso, 2023). To prepare the growing number of teachers who are recruited by the USA, there is a need to understand and examine the lived experiences of those who have gone ahead. However, there is very limited literature that explores the lived experiences of Filipino SPED teachers in how they adjust their pedagogical approaches and their unique adaptation experiences. There is even less available literature that examines the lives of foreign SPED teachers in the southern areas of the USA, including South Carolina. Hence, this study was conducted to examine the unique lived experiences of Filipino SPED teachers in South Carolina as they adjusted their classroom management and teaching methods. This study focuses on their professional integration, teaching strategies, and adaptation journeys.

This study serves as a basis for Filipino teachers on how to navigate the pedagogical landscape in the US and how to adapt their classroom management skills and teaching methods to US classrooms. Furthermore, by thoroughly examining the adaptation processes of Filipino SPED teachers in terms of adapting their pedagogical approaches to the U.S. education system whilst navigating cultural differences, this research sought to enlighten school administrators, policymakers, and educational stakeholders about the distinct contributions and requirements of international SPED teachers in effectively teaching SPED. This gives data-based insights on how to craft policies and design programs that would address the needs of foreign teachers, such as Filipino SPED teachers, so that they become effective teachers. Ultimately, this study aimed to encourage and promote inclusive and supportive classrooms where teachers can flourish as professionals, addressing the urgent needs of their students. Through this, they can leave a positive and lasting impact not only on the students with special needs but also on the U.S. education system. With all this in mind, not only will the findings from this study enhance the teaching experience of the SPED teachers, but also ultimately enhance the learning experience of the students.

Anchored on Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning as an iterative cycle where experience, reflection, and conceptualization reinforce each other (Morris, 2020), the Filipino SPED teachers' continuous learning and adaptation of pedagogical strategies were viewed and analyzed. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory integrates similar theories, such as the Lewinian Experiential Learning Model, Dewey's Model of Learning, and Piaget's Model of Learning and Cognitive Development, highlighting the central role of experience in learning. The theory presents a holistic, integrative perspective on learning where experience, perception, cognition, and behavior are aligned and combined. He presents this in the form of a cycle because the learnings gained from the experience become insights for another learning process.

The first stage in the process is the Concrete Experience. This refers to how the Filipino SPED teachers in the U.S. actively experience what it is like to teach a diverse set of students in a different education system, using different or modified pedagogical approaches. The way they experience it all is informed by their own cultural and professional backgrounds, and following the concept of continuity of experience, what they have observed and lived will later affect the things that will happen next. The second stage in the process is Reflective Observation, where Filipino SPED teachers reflect on their observations and experiences of teaching SPED to a culturally rich set of students and ponder what it means to teach SPED. The third stage is Abstract Conceptualization, where the Filipino SPED teachers formulate theories, concepts, and even mental maps about the things that are happening to them, such as which pedagogical approach will best work on students, what the students are all about, and more. Finally, the last stage is Active Experimentation. This is when the Filipino SPED teachers test their theories, such as which pedagogical approach is the most effective for a diverse audience, or plan their next experience. Since learning is a continuous process, each experiential learning process leads to more concrete experiences and another cycle of learning at a more complex level. As the learning process continues, the level of complexity of learning increases.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory as a framework provides insights into the thought and learning process of the Filipino SPED teachers, and how their different human faculties make sense of their experience as they adapt their classroom management techniques and teaching methods to an entirely new environment in South Carolina, USA. This is represented in the model shown below.

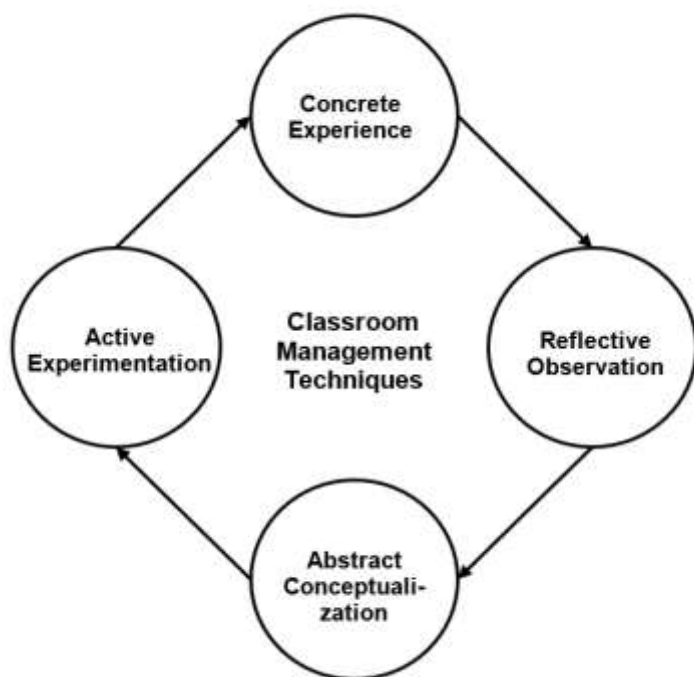


Figure 1. A model that illustrates the process of arriving at the essence

The cycle goes into a loop because what has been learned and practiced becomes the new concrete experience, and whatever factors influence it will lead to a new learning process, which will guide future behavior or action. With that said, this framework shows an iterative learning process in which Filipino SPED teachers continuously modify and improve their teaching methods via experience, introspection, and conceptualization. Through this cycle, they can gain a greater grasp of the teaching environment overseas and learn how to overcome obstacles so they can successfully support their students.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological approach based on Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology. It stresses putting aside prejudices and preconceptions in favor of concentrating on the core of participants' experiences as expressed in their own words (Moustakas, 1994). This approach was further supported by descriptive phenomenology based on Husserlian philosophy, which emphasizes the need to document the teachers' experiences in their most genuine forms, devoid of outside interpretation (Giorgi, 2009). By employing this combination method, the study recorded the experiences of Filipino SPED teachers in a manner that emphasizes their firsthand knowledge, opinions, and difficulties they encounter in South Carolina.

### Sampling and Participants

Six Filipino SPED teachers who are currently employed in South Carolina were chosen purposively for the study. According to Creswell (2013), a reasonable sample size for phenomenological research ranges from three to 25 participants. The sample size estimated for this study was ten, given the very few Filipino special education teachers in South Carolina who will be available to participate in this study. However, when data saturation was already reached, the data gathering stopped.

These participants have *at least* two years of teaching experience in both the Philippines and at least two years teaching in the U.S. This inclusion criterion was based on the study of Schultz (2024), where two years was determined to be the length for teachers to follow the rhythm of just wanting to survive to finally engaging with the students. Finally, to gain richer insights from the participants, the teachers should have had varied levels of experience in terms of years living and working in South Carolina.

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## Data Collection

Upon determining who the prospective participants were, the respondents were sent an invitation to participate in this qualitative study via their social media accounts, email, or in-person, and through their teacher associations, whichever was convenient. The recruits gave their informed consent to participate in this study by signing the Informed Consent Form. Depending on participant availability and convenience, each interview was performed in person and through Zoom.

The researcher conducted an in-depth face-to-face interview with the participants, using a semi-structured interview guide, which was validated by three experts in the field of Education or Pedagogy and pilot tested. The interview especially highlighted the lived experiences of the participants in adjusting their classroom management techniques and teaching strategies as they transitioned into and navigated the U.S. classroom. Follow-up sessions were carried out to elucidate answers, investigate new themes, and confirm conclusions following the initial data analysis. The findings' depth and believability were increased by this iterative process.

The responses were recorded using an audio recording tool and manually encoded using MS Excel. Breaking the statements into clusters or themes according to similarity in meaning and content was accomplished via MS Excel. This provided some level of flexibility for the encoder to move data around the worksheet. After the data were analyzed, the participants were consulted to review the identified themes as well as the final findings.

## Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using Moustakas' stages of transcendental phenomenology. The first step was epoché, which means "suspension of judgement" (Britannica, n.d.). This is also called bracketing because it involves a deliberate act of setting aside one's beliefs, biases, preconceived notions, and assumptions about the phenomenon. This allows the researcher to withhold judgment and properly focus on the lived experiences shared by the participants (Philosophy Institute, 2023; Britannica, n.d.). In this stage, the researcher approached the participants' stories with an open mind and promoted accurate, unvarnished knowledge of their experiences by recognizing potential biases.

The second step was phenomenological reduction, which includes Horizontalization and Clustering. Horizontalization involves reviewing the data gathered (e.g., interview transcripts), and identifying and segmenting the data into meaningful statements or units of meaning about teaching adjustment, cultural adaptation, and professional integration. After the process of horizontalization, clustering took place. This involves clustering significant segments into common themes. This helped identify the patterns in the respondents' answers. However, while they share patterns in the meaning of the statements, the names of the themes have not yet been assigned. At this stage, these observations are merely classified according to similarity or relatedness, and they are not interpreted yet.

The third step in Moustakas' stages of transcendental phenomenology was the imaginative variation, which includes systematic variation and structural description. In systematic variation, the researcher found many interpretations or points of view regarding the experiences of the subjects. To identify fundamental institutional, cultural, or individual elements influencing the participants' adaptation processes and to capture differences in their experiences, themes were developed. After which, the researcher used the themes to write a description of the lived experiences of the participants and what context has influenced the way that the participants have experienced the phenomenon. This last subprocess is also called structural description.

The fourth and final step in Moustakas' stages of transcendental phenomenology was the experience or the synthesis of meaning and essence. Numerous interpretations or points of view about the participants' experiences can be found here. The themes identified in the earlier steps were created to pinpoint the essential factors affecting participants' adaptation processes and to document variations in their experiences.

**Ethical Considerations**

The study was approved by the appropriate ethics review boards and conducted following institutional ethical guidelines. Each participant was given a document detailing the topic and objectives of the study, how their data would be handled, and the role and rights of the participant. The document also explicitly stated that the participant may withdraw from the study at any time without needing to give justification. The researcher complied with data privacy standards; thus, data are stored and handled securely.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The Filipino special education teachers’ classroom management techniques and teaching methods were summarized into the five themes, which are creating structure in the classroom, fostering an inclusive and supportive classroom, providing student-centered and differentiated instruction, supporting positive student behavior, and utilizing instructional and gaining collaborative supports.

Table 1 shows the themes and the codes developed from the data analysis.

Table 1. Theme Development

Theme	Subtheme	Codes
1. Creating Structure in the Classroom	Establishing routines	Building routines; Establishing routines; Establishing clear routines; Maintaining daily routines; Modeling behavior
	Consistency and transitions	Consistency in following routines; Use of consistent transitions; Structure and predictability for classroom management
	Expectations and rules	Establishing expectations; Expectation setting; Setting and sticking to classroom rules
2. Fostering an Inclusive and Supportive Classroom	Inclusive classroom environment	Classroom arrangement for inclusivity; Creating a culturally responsive classroom; Valuing “malasakit” in the classroom
	Emotional and sensory support	Providing safe breathing space; Provision of sensory breaks
	Social interaction opportunities	Cooperative play; Opportunities for social engagement
3. Providing student-centered and differentiated instruction	Differentiated instruction	Differentiated instruction; Modification of activities
	Individualized learning support	One-on-one learning; Small group for functional goals
	Student-centered engagement	Student-centered approach; Interactive learning; Promoting active participation; Students’ active participation; Offer of structured choices
4. Supporting Positive Student Behavior	Positive behavior support	Positive reinforcement; Positive behavioral intervention
	Behavior management strategies	Redirection and verbal prompting; Paralinguistic cues for behavior management
	Structured intervention	Use of behavior intervention plan to handle disruptive

	systems	behaviors; Use of escalation strategies to handle disruptive behaviors
5. Utilizing Instructional and Gaining Collaborative Supports	Instructional tools and materials	Use of adapted materials; Use of multisensory materials; Use of technology
	Visual instructional supports	Use of visual schedule; Use of visual support; Visual support for instructions
	Collaboration and institutional support	Updating and maintaining communication with parents and staff; Support from the admin

**Creating Structure in the Classroom.** This theme explains that a way for Special Education teachers to manage the classroom is by creating structure in the form of establishing routines that they can follow every day, by being consistent and using transitions, and setting expectations and rules.

The teachers state that following and maintaining clear daily routines allows them to build a positive, supportive, and inclusive learning environment. This also helps manage disruptive behaviors.

*P5: I handle disruptive behaviors by maintaining and consistently doing our daily routines... I build a positive, supportive, and inclusive learning environment by [following] clear routines [for] my students.*

*P6: My classroom management strategy in South Carolina, I really focus on structure and predictability. My students already know what to do when they walk into the room. For example, they immediately check the board, take out their... notebook, ELA, Math, or Chromebook, and start the warmup activity. I always keep a visual schedule posted, either on the board or on the wall or on the SMART board... because many of my students feel less anxious when they know what to expect*

Lester, Allanson, and Notar (2017) explained that establishing routines is foundational to classroom management. Routines help maintain order in the classroom and create predictability and independence amongst the students (Yuliana & Sukinah, 2025). This means that teachers do not have to keep on repeating their instructions since students would know what to do or what happens next. Keeping routines is beneficial not only to teachers but most importantly to students. Classroom management entails creating an environment that is conducive to learning, and routines create a safe space for students. Without the unnecessary distractions or noise, students can focus on learning. Further, in their study, Ellerbrock, et al. (2015) revealed that routines help “foster an academic-focused culture, cultivate shared norms and values, promote open and honest communication, encourage mutual respect and responsibility, facilitate teamwork and collaboration, and motivate academic excellence.”

There may be cases when students struggle to follow routines, especially when the routines are new. It is the teacher’s role to keep order in the classroom while also acknowledging that the students are still learning and that they would sometimes have difficulty following routines due to a myriad of reasons. P1 and P6 explain what they do when students find difficulty in following routines.

*P1: When the students struggle to follow routines, I always try to I always try to stay calm and be consistent.*

*P6: I don't assume they already know the routines, but I modeled them. We practice them, and we revisit them, regularly. Or you have to remind them... from time to time about class expectations.*

Related to routines is the use of consistent transitions from one lesson to the next. P6 shares their use of transitions as a strategy for classroom management.

*P6: I also maintain consistent transition procedures like countdowns or visual timers, so students can prepare mentally.*

Effective use of transitions, including their timing and duration, complements the structure established in the classroom. When perfectly planned, it creates predictability for students of what is next in their schedule. It also reduces interruptions, helps teachers pace themselves, and increases instructional time (Shahzad, Seema, & Reebea, 2020).

The use of, and the need to consistently follow, routines and transitions are supported by classroom rules. Demir, Sener, and Karaboga (2023) explained that “Classroom rules are a fundamental aspect of classroom management and ensuring compliance with established rules is crucial.” They further explained that rules exist in order to protect the rights of both the teacher and students. It also helps make effective and faster decisions, reduces instructional time, and fosters healthier relationships among teachers and students. When rules are clear, and the consequences of breaking these rules are properly explained and imposed, students understand the concept of reward and punishment for either breaking or following rules. It creates a safe space for everyone whilst improving behavior, self-confidence, and morale among the students (Demir, Sener, & Karaboga, 2023). This is something that participants make sure to establish as a basic strategy for classroom management.

*P6: I'll also make sure that classroom rules and expectations are clearly posted and explicitly taught.*

*P1: I always focus on establishing expectations... I guide them and [let them help] create classroom expectations so they would feel accountability and ownership with it*

P6 emphasizes that the rules and expectations are not just assumed. It is something taught. P1 also explains the importance of including the students in setting expectations. When the rules are democratically agreed upon, students are expected and hoped to most likely instinctively follow the rules and regulations (Demir, Sener, & Karaboga, 2023).

***Fostering an Inclusive and Supportive Classroom.*** This theme explains that a way for Special Education teachers to manage the classroom is by maintaining an inclusive classroom environment, providing emotional and sensory support, and facilitating social interaction opportunities.

*P6: As Filipino teachers, we value “malasakit”, which means deep care and compassion. I always try to build a relationship first before correcting behavior. Building a positive, inclusive environment. I believe students learn best when they feel safe and respected. In my classroom, we establish mutual respect and community norms together... I also tried to create a culturally responsive classroom where students feel seen and valued. I chose the strategy because students with disabilities thrive well in predictable and emotionally supportive environments, and when relationships are strong, behavior improves and engagement increases.*

P6 mentioned the word “malasakit,” which is a Filipino value that means “compassionate care.” Its root word is “-sakit” (difficulty/ pain), which suggests that in exhibiting *malasakit*, one shares in another’s difficulty. It involves empathy and compassion, encouraging the individual to go the extra mile or to find ways to improve the welfare of others (Haber Del Valle, 2022). By relieving others of the difficulty or pain, the individual feels relieved. Students with special needs experience learning differently compared to those in General Education. They may struggle in performing certain activities or exhibiting expected behaviors. In the true essence of *malasakit*, P6 states that before correcting the students’ behavior, she focuses first on building the relationship and allowing the students to feel safe in that space. The Australian Education Research Organization (2024) explains that positive teacher-student relationships foster empathy, build trust, and create a culturally safe environment, which helps students achieve learning success.

A way to foster an inclusive classroom is by being mindful of their needs and preparing physical space to accommodate them. P3 mentions preparing the classroom for students who might need extra space, especially when they use supportive devices or equipment like a wheelchair.

*P3: You also have to consider the arrangement of your classroom. Make sure that it will support all the students' needs. It will be [a] very positive environment for all your students. Since there are [students] who [are] in a wheelchair, make sure that it's wheelchair friendly. Don't put a lot of materials or furniture in the*

*middle of the room.*

Aside from physical space, they also need to be given mental space to breathe and have sensory breaks for when they feel overwhelmed or overstimulated by external stimuli. P2 and P6 mentioned about giving students the time and space to breath and relax when they become overstimulated.

*P2: Give space to the children. If she needs some space and alone time to calm down... Yes, sensory input just to calm [them] down... The kids are also given some time to walk in the hallway for time out. They go to the hallway or the sensory room just to calm down when they get overstimulated in the classroom.*

*P6: Sometimes I provide sensory breaks such as letting the student walk briefly in the hallway, or around the building, or go to the gym, or use a fidget tool, or sit in a beanbag chair for a few minutes. I focus more on reinforcing appropriate replacement behaviors rather than punishing negative ones.*

Finally, to foster an inclusive and supportive classroom, the teachers not only maintain healthy relationships between themselves and students, but they also encourage healthy, supportive, and collaborative relationships among students. P2 and P4 shared about providing opportunities for social engagement and cooperative play.

*P2: Use of technology, too, especially for kids now. However, before that, I first give a very concrete, visual representation of how the lesson is. [This becomes] an opportunity for social engagement.*

*P4: Cooperative play. So just to like, "Hey, there's... there are other people here, it's not just you". So, those are the best strategies for a special [education] 3- to 4-year-old.*

This gives room to breed empathy, teamwork, and a sense of community. Since some of SPED students, just like the nonverbal students, may have trouble interacting with others, opportunities like this allow them to mingle with their peers and learn appropriate social skills.

***Providing student-centered and differentiated instruction.*** This theme explains that a way for Special Education teachers to manage the classroom is by differentiated instruction, individualized support, and student-centered engagement. Differentiated instruction is a comprehensive teaching technique that is aimed at addressing the challenge of having to teach a group of students who have different learning styles. Sometimes, a different sociocultural background can also have an effect on how the student learns (Goyibova et al., 2025; Pasira, 2022).

P2 and P4 shared that students learn at different paces and in different ways. Because of that, they do differentiated instruction.

*P2: For instruction, since the group is diverse, whereas some learn easily and those who have slow progress, what I do is differentiated instruction. Some kids will be learning very simple lessons. Some, maybe, just with words. But the other kids will be working on sentences, especially those who are high-functioning. They will be working on [stories], a kindergarten passage, read, and then everything is modeled because they learn through modeling. Direct instruction. Explicit. Very, very explicit... very, very direct. And then, reteach*

*P4: As little ones with a lot of energy, we have to use differentiated instruction. Most likely, that's the most helpful way to help them because they understand and they intake the learnings differently... so, we have to find the best way for them to learn differently... One-on-one works very well as well since we have a very small group as of now. We have five kids. So one-on-one is like the go-to every day to make sure there's learning and they fully understand what is going on, what the routine is, and why they have to do this.*

The heart of differentiated instruction is prioritizing the needs of the students and providing individualized approaches to their learning. This is considered a technique in classroom management because it involves the need to group together students who have similar learning abilities. This also entails the need to prepare the appropriate physical space and materials for classroom activities.

Differentiated instruction acknowledges the diversity in education, especially in culturally and ability diverse

classrooms. Studies have shown that incorporating differentiated instruction is an effective technique that enhances student engagement and learning success (Goyibova et al., 2025; Pasira, 2022).

**Supporting Positive Student Behavior.** This theme explains that a way for Special Education teachers to manage the classroom is by promoting positive behavior through behavior management strategies and structured intervention strategies. The majority of the participants in this study mentioned positive reinforcement as a strategy they use for classroom management. Below are statements they shared.

*P1: Positive reinforcement, because they're kids. They're just beginning to understand. I always make sure to give verbal praises to students who are following their routines like saying, "Oh good job, Student A!"... I would reward [students] by becoming a line leader. When I do that, they [kind of] have motivation. It's like, "Okay, I need to really get in line so that I am going to be a line leader tomorrow."*

*P3: Positive reinforcements... You give rewards, you give tokens... The reinforcement has to be tangible, like there has to be a token, like chocolates or anything. It's not just a simple positive regard or a positive statement like "Good job!" or praise. For the bigger kids, I guess tangible rewards.*

*P5: Positive reinforcements, such as, um... giving rewards or a token reward to support routine and encouraging appropriate behavior for my students.*

*P6: Positive reinforcement is very important in my classroom. I use a token system, rewards, behavior charts, and a lot of specific praise.*

Positive reinforcement has been found to have a positive effect on the students' academic performance and success (Ismail, 2023). Ghafar (2023) also revealed in his study that positive reinforcement encourages a sense of accountability amongst the students, which motivates them to perform better. For the participants in this study, they give positive reinforcement by giving tangible rewards or praise. However, there are some cases when positive reinforcement no longer becomes the most appropriate course of action. An example would be when a student disrupts class. Instead of jumping straight to negative reinforcement or positive punishment, teachers give paralinguistic cues to give a warning or redirect the student towards proper behavior. Below are their statements.

*P1: I also use non-verbal cues in my attempt to redirect the student without trying to disrupt the class.*

*P3: I change the tone of my voice. For the small ones, it's just like what I mentioned, it's like conditioning the students. If you change the tone of your voice, they will associate it with "Oh no, she's angry," or "It's time for me to sit down."*

*P6: I also use escalation strategies like lowering my voice, standing nearby, or referring to limited choices, instead of letting students write one paragraph. You could have them write at least two to three sentences.*

In addition, there are cases when students become disruptive because they are overwhelmed or overstimulated in the classroom. When this happens, the participants claim that they use intervention strategies to mitigate the disruptive behavior. These strategies include the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and the Behavior Interventional Plan (BIP). Below are some of their statements related to this.

*P4: I have a nonverbal [student], but so loud, who's always yelling, screaming on top of his lungs. So [with those], we use PBIS – Positive Behavioral Intervention [and Supports]. So, it's like... removing the bad behavior and rewarding him.*

*P6: When students struggle to follow routines or display disruptive behaviors, I rely heavily on the BIP or the behavior intervention plan. I follow the replacement behaviors, identify in the plan, apply antecedent strategies, and consistently implement reinforcement. For example, if a student tends to leave their seat during dependent math or ELA work or walk out of the class just to avoid difficult tasks, I teach them to use a help card to request a short break instead.*

The PBIS aligns well with the teachers' strategy of positive reinforcement because it is anchored on promoting positive behavior in the classroom. It helps make the learning environment a safe space while cultivating the emotional, social, and academic aspects of the student. P6's Behavior Intervention is also part of the PBIS. It functions as PBIS's second tier (Arway, 2023).

Overall, the participants highlight reinforcing positive behavior more than punishing negative behaviors. This helps create a space that is conducive to learning.

***Utilizing Instructional and Gaining Collaborative Supports.*** This theme explains that a way for Special Education teachers to manage the classroom is by providing instructional tools and materials, visual instructional supports, and collaboration and institutional support. Previously, it has been discussed that in classroom management, it is important to employ differentiated instructions to accommodate each of the students who come from diverse backgrounds. By doing so, it promotes an inclusive learning environment. It also cultivates values of *malasakit*, which entails empathy and a sense of community. A way to manifest these is to provide the appropriate materials that would help the students learn better. P2 and P5 discuss using multisensory materials and visual supports to give a variety of opportunities for the students to learn. This makes learning engaging at the same time. Their statements are found below.

*P2: Multisensory materials... – providing different resources for the kids, because multiple exposure means giving multiple opportunities for the kids to learn.*

*P5: I use visual schedules and visual cues in teaching my students the concepts that they need to learn, as well as in addressing the behaviors or redirecting the behaviors of the students.*

In addition, P6 added including the parents and support staff in the development or progress of the students' education.

*P6: Communication with parents and support staff is another case strategy. I regularly update them! about student progress and behavior. All these practices align with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or the idea, especially when it comes to supporting student IEP goals.*

Parents hold a very important role in the student's academic success. Utami (2022) explained that when parents are involved in the academic life of a student, it helps improve the student's academic performance and participation in school-related activities. They can be involved in helping with schoolwork, encouraging their children to participate in school events, and understanding how else to help their children through the teachers' guidance. With that, classroom management does not only involve relationship-building between teachers and students. Parents are also part of it.

**Relating Findings to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory.** There are three major points of discussion. First, the findings showed how the teachers went through the process of experiential learning. They had *concrete experience* by teaching in the U.S. Classrooms and learning the extent of their roles and responsibilities. After that, they were able to have a *reflective observation* on how similar or different the pedagogical strategies are in the U.S. compared to the Philippines. What they found was that there are similarities in the classroom management techniques and teaching methods. However, what differed was the sociocultural and legal contexts. In the US, the classroom is culturally and linguistically diverse while also heavily influenced by the American culture that empowers students to express themselves freely. These contexts inform the pedagogical approaches that the teacher must apply. With that in mind, in the US, it is more apt to apply a more student-centered approach to address the different student needs while ensuring that the students are learning as much as they can. Further, federal and state laws (IDEA) require teachers to set IEP goals with their students and align these with educational standards.

The teachers then go through *abstract conceptualization* to form new strategies that would allow them to teach effectively. This may involve collaborating with colleagues, asking for help and support from peers and the admin, and attending professional development meetings where teachers can share best practices. Finally, the teachers perform *active experimentation* where they get to test these strategies in class.

Second, the culture shock has led the Filipino special education teachers to adapt and push towards professional growth. Before, the teachers were challenged by the disruptive behaviors of the students, particularly with how aggressive and direct they can be. This is a contrast to the more authority-respecting culture of Filipino students. However, because of this shift, the teachers are empowered to be more creative and explore more classroom management techniques and teaching strategies that would allow them to build rapport with students and establish meaningful relationships. With that, it has slowly brought the teachers to adopt student-centered pedagogy and embrace data-driven practices.

Finally, the introduction of new and advanced technologies, such as the Unique Learning System, Promethean Board, and the like, and the provision of other learning materials, has shown how different the education landscape is compared to the Philippines. It required the teachers to quickly adapt and master the new technologies and digital tools for effective teaching and learning.

## CONCLUSION

In the US classrooms, the Filipino special education teachers perform classroom management techniques by creating structure in the classroom, fostering an inclusive and supportive classroom, providing student-centered and differentiated instruction, supporting positive student behavior, and utilizing instructional and gaining collaborative supports. Adaptability was a key to survival and professional success. Filipino special education teachers reported that it was a challenge to navigate the sociocultural and economic aspects of both the personal and professional experience of living and working in the U.S. However, what makes them thrive is how they adapt to the environment by developing the right mindset and applying the appropriate methodologies and approaches.

The adjustment to both living conditions and work situations demand continuous learning process. It is a continuous cycle of concrete experience (teaching in the U.S. Classrooms and collaborating with peers), reflective observation (comparing the teaching methods in the U.S. versus the Philippines), abstract conceptualization (forming new classroom management techniques and teaching methods), and active experimentation (applying classroom management techniques and teaching methods in the classroom). Active collaboration and mentorship support the learning process of the Filipino special education teachers. They provide the Filipino teachers the much-needed guidance that is not always found in guidebooks and manuals, and they signal whether the Filipino teachers are moving towards the right direction with their work.

It is recommended that the U.S. School Districts implement onboarding programs that are specially designed to cater to international teachers, such as the Filipino special education teachers. This should include the practical and legal components of the IEP process, training for Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) for behavior management, and an orientation to the use of modern technology in the classroom. U.S. School Districts can also organize seminars or forums where teachers can meet to discuss best practices and operate as some form of a support group for international teachers as they transition into the U.S. Classrooms and make adjustments to their personal and professional lives.

Policymakers in the Philippines, particularly the Department of Education (DepEd), need to enhance their training for pre-departure to the U.S. The training modules should include an orientation on the U.S. culture and educational landscape, documentation practices in preparation for the IEP process, and knowledge and use of assistive technologies, especially those that have not yet been introduced to Philippine classrooms. Training and workshops can also include personal and professional development practices so that the Filipino special education teachers are holistically well-equipped to teach in a foreign land.

The findings of the study suggest that the Filipino special education teacher must develop the right mindset of being open to new experiences, commitment to lifelong and continuous learning, and a proactive search for peers and mentors who can guide the way to a successful adaptation into and navigation of the U.S. classrooms and sociocultural landscape. It is also recommended that they foster empathy and compassion in students while being firm on classroom policies and keeping a consistent set of routines. This helps create a classroom culture that is centered on mutual respect and responsibility.

It is recommended for future researchers to expand the study and recruit more participants from multiple states or countries to collect richer data and enhance the transferability of findings. Future researchers can also consider incorporating mixed methods in gathering data to strengthen the validity of the study and capture a more comprehensive perspective. Perspectives can come from teacher journals, classroom observation, student performance records, and the like. Further, they can also conduct a quantitative study so that findings are based on empirical, measurable, and computable data. They can also make direct comparisons between Filipinos who still teach in the Philippines, and those who have taught for quite a while in the US. Moreover, future researchers can also conduct longitudinal studies to monitor and note the career progression and retention rates of the Filipino special education teachers.

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