



Crossing Cultures: A Narrative Inquiry into Filipino Teachers' Personal and Professional Experiences in Navajo Nation Schools

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Abstract

This study explored the personal narratives and professional experiences of Filipino teachers working in Bureau of Indian Education and tribally controlled schools across the Navajo Nation during School Year 2024-2025. Using qualitative narrative inquiry, data were gathered from 15 Filipino teachers through in-depth semi-structured interviews and written narrative reflections, then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. The findings revealed that participants initially encountered culture shock, instructional adjustment difficulties, professional isolation, resource constraints, and homesickness. Over time, they developed culturally responsive teaching practices, stronger community engagement, and adaptive coping strategies anchored in Filipino values, faith, peer support, and reflective practice. Participants came to function not only as classroom teachers but also as cultural learners, bridge-builders, mentors, and community contributors in Indigenous school settings. The study highlights the need for stronger onboarding systems, culturally grounded preparation, mentoring support, and institutional policies that respond to the realities faced by internationally recruited teachers in rural and Indigenous contexts.

Subject Areas

Leadership, Sociology

Keywords

Filipino Teachers, Narrative Inquiry, Navajo Nation Schools, Indigenous Education, Cultural Adaptation, Teacher Resilience

1. Introduction

International teacher migration has reshaped staffing in high-need schools across the United States, with Filipino educators emerging as a significant workforce in rural and reservation districts. In this study, identity reconstruction refers to how Filipino teachers re-negotiate their sense of self as educators, migrants, and community members while teaching in Navajo Nation schools, while cultural resonance refers to moments when their values, practices, and ways of relating meaningfully connect with Navajo students' cultural backgrounds and community expectations. Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and tribally controlled schools serving the Navajo Nation have increasingly relied on J-1 and H-1B-linked appointments to address persistent teacher shortages (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023 [1]). At the same time, Indigenous education scholarship emphasizes that effective teaching in these settings depends on culturally sustaining pedagogy, relational accountability, and sustained community engagement (Persaud, Wannamaker, Stark *et al.*, 2025 [2]; Kulago, 2024 [3]). The intersection of transnational teacher mobility and Indigenous education thus raises important questions about how internationally recruited Filipino teachers experience, adapt to, and contribute within Indigenous school communities.

Existing literature documents that Filipino teachers bring strong cultural intelligence, professional commitment, and relational values such as *pakikipagkapwa*, *paggalang*, and *paglilingkod* to their international assignments (Bance & Adarlo, 2024 [4]; Cañete & Del Castillo, 2022 [5]). However, studies on Filipino educators in U.S. public schools have largely focused on urban or suburban contexts, leaving a gap in understanding their experiences in Indigenous reservation schools (Del Valle, 2024 [6]; Coloma, 2009 [7]). Research on Indigenous education further underscores that non-Indigenous teachers often face acute challenges in adapting to place-based knowledge systems, kinship structures, and community protocols when these are not part of their preparation (Lowe & Weuffen, 2024 [8]).

Recent scholarship on culturally responsive teaching [9], reflexive thematic analysis, and teacher resilience in cross-cultural settings (Kuncoro & Putranta, 2025 [10]) provides theoretical grounding for examining how Filipino teachers negotiate culture shock, instructional adaptation, and identity reconstruction in Navajo Nation schools. Together, these literatures frame the present inquiry into how participants describe their lived experiences, the values that sustain their resilience, the roles and contributions they perform, and the policy and institutional supports they identify as necessary for effective service.

Guided by these contexts, this study addressed five research questions: 1) How do Filipino teachers describe their lived experiences in Navajo Nation schools? 2) What personal values and cultural beliefs sustain their resilience and identity reconstruction? 3) How do they describe their roles and contributions to the academic and personal development of Indigenous students? 4) What insights do they provide regarding policy, preparation, and institutional support? 5) What are the implications of the findings for educational management for the Navajo Res-

ervation School and the Philippine educational landscape?

2. Methods and Procedures

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design analyzed through Braun and Clarke's (2019) [11] reflexive thematic analysis. Narrative inquiry was selected to honor the storied nature of the participants' transnational teaching experiences and to foreground how they make sense of crossing cultures over time. Reflexive thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify, interpret, and synthesize patterns of meaning across participants' narratives while remaining attentive to the particularity of each story and to the researcher's reflexive role in knowledge production. In this study, the analysis prioritized both the integrity of individual narrative accounts and cross-case themes, allowing composite themes such as culture shock, resilience, and community engagement to be illustrated through rich narrative accounts. This combined approach is consistent with qualitative research traditions that center participants' voices, context, and meaning-making (Creswell & Poth, 2018 [12]).

The study was conducted in four schools serving Navajo Nation communities in New Mexico, U.S.A.: Atsá Biyáázh Community School, Northwest Middle School, Northwest High School, and Alamo Community School. These schools include Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and tribally controlled schools characterized by rural locations, predominantly Indigenous student populations, and persistent teacher-staffing challenges.

Fifteen Filipino teachers (eight male, seven female) employed in BIE and tribally controlled Navajo Nation schools during School Year 2024-2025 participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with selection criteria requiring at least one full year of direct teaching experience in a Navajo Nation school under J-1 or H-1B-linked appointment. Their teaching assignments spanned elementary, middle, and high school grades across English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Special Education. Educational attainment ranged from bachelor's degrees to completed master's and doctoral coursework. Twenty (20) teachers were invited to participate through school administrators' invitations and professional networks, of whom 15 consented and were included in the study.

The study utilized three instruments aligned with the research questions: 1) a Demographic Profile Sheet capturing sex, age, years of U.S. teaching experience, teaching assignment, highest educational attainment, and visa type; 2) a Semi-Structured Interview Guide organized around cultural adaptation, instructional practice, professional challenges, relational engagement, values and beliefs, professional roles, and policy insights; and 3) Narrative Reflection Prompts that invited participants to recount critical incidents, turning points, and the values sustaining their resilience. Instruments were content-validated by experts in qualitative research and Indigenous education.

Following ethical clearance and informed consent, the researcher conducted in-

depth interviews (60 - 90 minutes each) via secure video conferencing, supplemented by written narrative reflections submitted by participants. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and returned to participants for member-checking. Field notes and reflexive memos were maintained throughout the data-collection period from August 2024 to May 2025.

Transcripts and reflections were analyzed using a six-phase reflexive thematic analysis: 1) data familiarization through repeated reading; 2) generation of initial codes; 3) construction of candidate themes; 4) review of themes against coded extracts and the full dataset; 5) defining and naming themes according to central organizing concepts; and 6) production of an interpretive narrative supported by participant excerpts. Throughout this process, reflexive memoing, peer debriefing, and maintenance of an audit trail strengthened analytic rigor and trustworthiness.

2.1. Researcher Positionality

The first author is a Filipino educator and educational researcher with experience mentoring Filipino teachers pursuing international teaching opportunities, including appointments in U.S. high-need and reservation schools. As a cultural insider to the Filipino teaching community yet an outsider to Navajo Nation, the researcher occupied a hybrid positionality that facilitated rapport with participants while requiring sustained reflexive attention to assumptions, shared cultural frames, and power dynamics in representation. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained reflexive journals, engaged in peer debriefing with the co-author, and revisited transcripts and analytic decisions to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives and respectful of Navajo community contexts.

2.2. Ethical Clearance

This study received ethical approval from the Graduate School Ethics and Review Committee of the Nueva Ecija University Ethics Committee, through certification issued by Dr. Jet C. Aquino, Chairperson, dated February 12, 2026. Permission to conduct the research was also obtained from Dr. Josanlo Caldera, Delegated Executive Director of Shiprock Associated School, Incorporated, as well as from the appropriate Bureau of Indian Education, tribal education, and community authorities overseeing the participating schools. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were informed that participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time without penalty, and that their identities would be protected through pseudonymization. Cultural references and other community-sensitive information were handled with due respect for Navajo protocols, and all digital files were securely stored and used solely for the purposes of this research.

3. Results and Discussion

Analysis of the participants' narratives produced major findings organized around

the five research questions. The findings synthesize the recurring patterns across cases rather than presenting each individual theme.

Table 1 shows the lived experiences of Filipino teachers in Bureau of Indian Education and Navajo Reservation Schools.

Table 1. Themes, description and codes.

Research Question/ Category	Theme No.	Theme Title	Description	Codes (Participant Responses)
<i>Research Question 1: How do Filipino teachers describe their lived experiences?</i>				
	Theme 1	Immersion in Indigenous Cultural Life	Filipino teachers entered schools where Indigenous language, kinship systems, clan relationships, and community traditions were woven into the daily rhythm of school life. The school was experienced as a culturally grounded environment, not merely an instructional space.	P1: Deep cultural roots in Indigenous identity and traditions P2: Kinship and respect; morning Navajo greetings P7: Clan acknowledgements; family ties to land and livestock P12: Native language greetings; community-based values P15: Ceremonies, land acknowledgments, community rituals
	Theme 2	Cultural Resonance Between Filipino and Indigenous Values	Participants recognized shared orientations between their Filipino background and Navajo community values—including harmony, kinship, spirituality, storytelling, and environmental stewardship. This resonance reduced social distance and facilitated adjustment.	P3: Land stewardship and spiritual balance P6: Navajo harmony resonates with Filipino family culture P4: Storytelling at the heart of both cultures P1: Hózhó—balance and harmony in PLCs P8: Land, water, and community story as student identity
	Theme 3	Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Adaptation	Teachers modified their instructional practices by incorporating local knowledge, agricultural contexts, Indigenous-author texts, bilingual support, and student-centered structures. They shifted from lecture-based Philippine teaching styles toward cooperative and contextual models.	P1: Respect for traditions; Navajo examples in lessons P5: Visual/hands-on learners; community data in lessons P7: Math word problems linked to agricultural tasks; shift from lecture P10: Indigenous-author texts; bilingual student voice P11: Ranch/farm site visits; land knowledge in lessons P12: Home/homework tasks around family environment

Continued

Theme 4	Building Belonging Through Community Engagement	Belonging was not automatic but developed through active participation in Family Nights, Navajo Language Week, clan dinners, elder visits, and community showcases. Relational investment outside the classroom built trust with families and students.	P2: Family Night and Navajo Language Week P9: Elder guest speakers; family relationship-building P13: Clan dinners; meeting families outside school P15: Robotics club water-sensor project; family showcase P1: Attending community events to understand the worldview P7: Cultural nights; student home/family story-sharing
Theme 5	From Cultural Outsider to Cultural Participant	Adaptation was developmental, not static. Participants moved from initial unfamiliarity and disconnection toward deeper participation, cultural understanding, and identity alignment through sustained engagement with Indigenous community life.	P7: Initially felt like a cultural outsider; attended cultural nights P9: Initially disconnected; shifted to listening and co-constructing P1: Realized teaching is about the cultural heartbeat of the community
Research Question 1 (cont.): Instructional and Pedagogical Strategies in Cross-Cultural Classrooms			
Theme 6	Culturally Responsive and Contextualized Instruction	Teachers situated lessons within students' cultural environments by linking academic content to Navajo traditions, agricultural tasks, family events, and community knowledge rather than relying on decontextualized materials.	P1: Blends Filipino background with Navajo-centered learning P2: Folktales, legends, sheep herding, and corn math problems P7: Math word problems linked to local agricultural tasks P14: Real-life budgeting scenarios; family feeding animals P9: Funds of Knowledge from family/community tasks
Theme 7	Cooperative and Student-Centered Learning	Participants adopted Kagan structures (Walk-Pair-Share, Rally Coach, Quiz-Quiz-Trade), peer teaching, guided reading circles, and inquiry-based approaches to foster student talk, collaboration, and active engagement.	P1: Kagan structures—Walk-Pair-Share, Rally Coach P2: Think-Pair-Share; Quiz-Quiz-Trade P7: Kagan structures to build peer talk P8: Peer-teaching and student-designed inquiry P4: Cooperative groups for reading comprehension P10: Guided reading circles P15: Peer mentoring in STEM

Continued

Theme 8	Land-Based and Experiential Pedagogy	Teachers used local environments, community resources, and place-connected inquiry—including soil sampling, water pH testing, mesa field trips, and STEM projects tied to local water and soil issues—to make learning experiential and culturally meaningful.	P3: PBL units with soil samples/water pH; 5E Science Model P6: Inquiry-based learning with rocks, plants, water; mesa field trips P8: Local geology/erosion compared to textbook science P11: Phenomena-based units—soil erosion, water cycle P15: STEM tasks on water quality and soil testing; 3D models/robotics
Theme 9	Differentiated and Inclusive Instruction	Participants accommodated diverse learners through readiness grouping, digital tools (IXL, Freckle), scaffolded worksheets, UDL frameworks, visual supports, bilingual manipulatives, co-teaching, and alternative assessments tailored to Indigenous and multilingual contexts.	P1: Readiness grouping; IXL and Freckle; scaffolded worksheets P11: Hands-on tasks; visual scaffolding for ELL students P12: Small-group DI; manipulatives for language development P13: Visuals, alternative assessments, SPED co-teaching P10: Universal Design for Learning (UDL) frameworks
Theme 10	Culturally Grounded Literacy and Language Support	Literacy instruction was used as a vehicle for cultural affirmation. Teachers employed Indigenous-author texts, bilingual word walls, elder partnerships, student podcasts reflecting home culture, and family storytelling prompts to validate students' linguistic and cultural identities.	P4: Culturally relevant texts; Philippine and Navajo folktales P9: Literature circles with Indigenous-author texts P10: Guided reading circles; student podcasts; elder/knowledge keeper partners P12: Bilingual word walls (English + Native language); family stories for writing prompts

Research Question 1 (cont.): Professional Challenges Encountered in Reservation School Contexts

Theme 11	Inconsistent Student Attendance and Competing Family Responsibilities	Student attendance was frequently interrupted by agricultural, livestock, and household obligations. Teachers observed that many students prioritized family livelihood over schooling, and limited local employment options affected educational motivation.	P1: ~80% do not fully value education; family agriculture/livestock priorities P2: High absenteeism during community/family events P3: Students juggle family duties, affecting attendance P7: Inconsistent attendance; students assist families P14: Students skip periods to assist in family tasks
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Theme 12	Limited Resources and Infrastructural Constraints	Participants worked with shortages in reading materials, laboratory equipment, technology, and instructional support. Teaching required constant improvisation, self-made materials, and creativity simply to maintain instructional delivery.	P2: Resource shortages; designs own materials P3: Limited laboratory facilities P5: Slow internet; outdated devices P8: Heavy teaching load; under-resourced science labs P10: Rural/tribal setting; fewer resources and substitutes P11: Minimal lab/material resources; limited mentorship P15: Grant writing burden; limited access to PD
Theme 13	Linguistic and Instructional Adjustment Challenges	Teachers navigated students' language insecurity in English, multilingual classroom demands, and the gap between Philippine and U.S. educational expectations. Effective instruction required substantial scaffolding and communication adaptation.	P4: Students hesitate to speak English; they use visual aids and sentence stems P6: Rural resource shortage; differing PH vs. US educational expectations P12: Heavy demands of assessments in a multilingual environment
Theme 14	Workload Intensification and Professional Isolation	Understaffing, high turnover, multi-grade classes, heavy IEP caseloads, long commutes, limited mentorship, and reduced access to professional development intensified workplace pressure and professional loneliness.	P9: Under-staffed schools; high turnover disrupts team-planning P10: Multi-role demands; fewer resources and substitutes P11: Long commute; minimal mentorship for new teachers P12: Multi-grade classes; high workload due to teacher shortage P13: Heavy IEP caseload; limited co-teaching logistics P15: Grant writing as an additional burden
Theme 15	Recruitment, Visa, and Employment-Related Burdens	Several participants carried recruitment fee debt and experienced stress related to visa processing and employment insecurity. These burdens compounded classroom-level challenges and raised concerns about ethical recruitment.	P7: Paid recruitment fee; carries debt and added stress P8: Opaque recruiter/visa process; high-stakes visa application P9: High upfront recruiter fees; stories of exploitation; visa stress P10: Large upfront fees reported by many Filipino teachers P13: Recruitment fee debt adds pressure P15: Recruitment fees/debt still a burden

Continued

Research Question 1 (cont.): Personal Challenges Encountered

Theme 16	Homesickness and Separation from Family	Distance from family in the Philippines was a persistent source of loneliness and emotional strain. Separation from loved ones was described as a “constant test of endurance” that required ongoing management.	P1: Living far from family results in loneliness and homesickness P2: Isolated area; sometimes feels lonely P3: Distance from family—a constant test of endurance P7: Homesickness for the Philippines P9: Homesickness; managing expectations from family back home P13: Misses extended family
Theme 17	Rural Isolation and Environmental Adjustment	Adapting to remote living conditions—unfamiliar climates, limited amenities, reduced social opportunities, long commutes, and harsh weather—shaped teachers’ daily well-being and required patient lifestyle adjustment.	P1: Adapting to local climate requires patience and flexibility P4: Adjusting to climate; limited entertainment in rural areas P7: Cold/rural environment; fewer amenities; smaller social circle P11: Rural weather; limited social network; fewer amenities P15: Long commutes; rural weather/roads
Theme 18	Role Strain and Competing Responsibilities	Participants balanced full-time teaching with doctoral studies, financial remittances, caregiving abroad, credential requirements, and parenting in an unfamiliar country. This cumulative burden increased vulnerability to fatigue and burnout.	P1: Balancing teaching with doctoral studies—demanding physically and mentally P8: Doctoral studies; living away from family; cultural isolation P10: Supporting family abroad financially; balancing credential requirements P6: Balancing motherhood abroad and professional duties P12: Balancing parenting; limited childcare P15: Evening grad classes; remittance pressure
Theme 19	Practical Adaptation to Daily Life in a Remote Setting	Teachers had to learn unfamiliar systems for banking, insurance, transportation, and childcare while simultaneously managing culture shock and teaching demands in a rural American setting.	P9: Long commute; limited amenities P12: Limited childcare P14: Unfamiliar banking, credit, and car insurance in rural NM; limited social circle; culture shock
Theme 20	Resilience Through Meaning, Faith, and Community Connection	Despite personal hardships, participants found strength through community involvement, faith, peer mentoring, research writing, outdoor activities, and a sense of vocational mission. Resilience was relational, spiritual, and purposeful.	P1: Community involvement and faith; cultural nights; tutoring; parent engagement P2: Warmth of coworkers and community P3: Weekend hiking trips and research writing P4: Community gatherings provide joy P5: Mentoring younger teachers provides meaning

Continued

Research Question 2: What personal values and cultural beliefs do Filipino teachers utilize to sustain their resilience and navigate identity reconstruction in their host schools?

Theme 21	Core Filipino Values as Moral and Relational Anchors	Paglilingkod (service), paggalang (respect), and pakikipagkapwa (shared humanity) functioned as foundational values that provided purpose, direction, and stability. These were not abstract ideals but lived principles guiding daily teaching and relationships.	P1: Paglilingkod, paggalang, pakikipagkapwa guide teaching P2: Pakikipagkapwa and paglilingkod keep her strong P7: Leans on service and shared humanity P3: Respect and perseverance drive teaching P4: Upholds paggalang; quiet nightly reflection and prayer P8: Respect and relational teaching aligned with Hózhó P5: Service and resilience define daily work P12: Respect, shared community, pakikipagkapwa P15: Innovation, service, building resilience
Theme 22	Faith, Reflection, and Community Connection as Resilience Resources	Participants sustained emotional balance through prayer, journaling, gratitude practices, peer debriefing with Filipino teacher cohorts, community participation, and lifelong learning orientations. Resilience was both internally cultivated and externally supported.	P2: Faith as a source of strength P4: Quiet nightly reflection and prayer P6: Faith, family online calls, and journaling P9: Gratitude jar of daily wins; monthly Filipino-teacher cohort debriefing P9: Local cultural workshops; pakikipagkapwa and relational care P10: Lifelong learning and respect for community wisdom
Theme 23	Identity Reconstruction Through Cultural Alignment and Purposeful Growth	Professional identity was reconstructed through the recognition that Filipino values aligned with the Navajo concept of Hózhó (balance and harmony). This cultural convergence allowed teachers to see themselves as culturally grounded educators rather than displaced outsiders.	P1: Filipino values align naturally with Hózhó—balance and harmony P8: Respect and relational teaching aligned with Navajo Hózhó P10: Lifelong learning and respect for community wisdom P15: Focus on innovation, service, and building resilience

Research Question 3: How do Filipino teachers describe their roles and contributions to the academic and personal development of indigenous students?

Theme 24	Teachers as Cultural Bridges and Advocates	Participants saw themselves as connecting global knowledge with local Indigenous realities—affirming students' language and identity while opening pathways to broader academic and future possibilities. Their role involved cultural mediation, not just instruction.	P1: Teacher and cultural bridge; connects global perspectives with local wisdom P2: Bridge of understanding between cultures; integrates community values P7: Bridge bringing solid math instruction; validates students' lived experiences
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Theme 25	Teachers as Facilitators of Culturally Relevant Academic Learning	By integrating culturally relevant examples in math, science, and literacy, teachers ensured that academic content was accessible, meaningful, and identity-affirming. Instruction was most effective when it honored students' cultural contexts.	<p>P1: Culturally relevant examples in math and science</p> <p>P3: Science as part of cultural continuity; protecting natural resources</p> <p>P8: STEM connects to the land and the community's future (environmental monitoring)</p> <p>P10: Literacy with intentional promotion of student culture and language</p> <p>P12: Foundational literacy/numeracy with family stories and bilingual supports</p>
Theme 26	Teachers as Mentors of Student Confidence, Aspiration, and Identity	Beyond academics, teachers nurtured self-efficacy, cultural pride, leadership, and expanded horizons. They helped students see their culture as an asset and themselves as potential STEM professionals, problem-solvers, and community contributors.	<p>P9: Raises literacy and self-efficacy; promotes cultural pride as an asset</p> <p>P10: Boosts math/science proficiency; broadens horizons for STEM/CTE pathways</p> <p>P14: Improves foundational math; connects to careers in agriculture and construction</p> <p>P11: Students lead cultural writing/podcast projects and take leadership roles</p> <p>P15: Sparks STEM interest; builds maker mindsets and post-reservation pathways</p>
Theme 27	Teachers as Contributors to School Improvement and Inclusive Educational Practice	Participants contributed beyond the classroom through peer mentoring, curriculum planning, data-driven school initiatives, STEM Week programs, environmental science clubs, and co-teaching for students with disabilities. Their impact was institutional, not just instructional.	<p>P1: Mentors peers; assists curriculum planning; supports BIE One Plan and STAR data</p> <p>P5: Technology mentor; supports school improvement plan</p> <p>P3: Helps design school STEM Week program</p> <p>P11: Mentors students in the science club focused on local environmental issues</p> <p>P13: Ensures students with disabilities are fully included; co-creates personal learning goals</p>
Research Question 4: What insights do Filipino teachers provide regarding policy, preparation, and institutional support in Indigenous school communities?			
Theme 28	Mentorship and Induction Support	Participants called for structured mentorship pairing international teachers with experienced Indigenous educators—from pre-placement orientation through monthly PLC sessions in the first year. Mentorship was seen as relational, cultural, and emotional, not merely procedural.	<p>P1: Structured mentorship and cultural immersion for international teachers</p> <p>P7: Local culture orientation; Indigenous educator as mentor-buddy</p> <p>P9: Induction pairing with experienced local/Indigenous mentors</p> <p>P10: Ongoing cultural mentorship</p> <p>P11: First-year mentorship monitoring</p> <p>P13: Comprehensive mentorship for SPED international teachers</p>

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Theme 29	Cultural and Pedagogical Preparation	Teachers recommended pre-deployment preparation in Indigenous education, land-based pedagogy, culturally sustaining approaches, and realistic job previews for rural/tribal placements. Cultural readiness was framed as an institutional obligation, not individual discovery.	<p>P1: Indigenous education and community partnership modules</p> <p>P3: Cultural-integration workshops for international science educators</p> <p>P8: Training in land-based pedagogy and rural/tribal education</p> <p>P9: Realistic job previews; housing/stipends; PD in culturally sustaining pedagogy</p> <p>P10: Professional learning in culturally sustaining pedagogy</p> <p>P14: Onboarding in land, culture, and family roles; phased responsibilities</p>
Theme 30	Instructional Resources and Material Support	Participants called for culturally relevant ready-made resources, bilingual materials, equipment grants for rural labs, ICT maintenance support, and fast-track procurement systems. Resource provision was treated as an equity issue, not a convenience.	<p>P2: Ready-made culturally relevant resources for new international teachers</p> <p>P3: Equipment grants for rural science labs</p> <p>P4: Bilingual literacy resources and cross-cultural reading sets</p> <p>P5: ICT integration and maintenance support in rural schools</p> <p>P6: Accessible materials rooted in Indigenous science</p> <p>P9: Fast-track rural resource procurement</p> <p>P11: Small grants for under-resourced labs</p> <p>P15: Seed grants for STEM; remote-ready online training</p>
Theme 31	Housing and Rural-Living Assistance	Teachers identified stable and affordable housing near the school, transportation support, and community orientation tours as necessary institutional conditions for teacher retention and effectiveness.	<p>P7: Housing and transportation support for rural living</p> <p>P8: Rural housing and logistics assistance</p> <p>P9: Housing or stipends for remote placements</p> <p>P10: Rural housing and logistics support</p> <p>P11: Housing stipends; orientation tours of the community</p> <p>P13: Housing and logistics support in rural/tribal areas</p> <p>P14: Housing and transport support</p>
Theme 32	Ethical Recruitment and Employment Processes	Participants called for transparent fee disclosures, clear employment contracts, realistic expectation statements, and streamlined visa processing. Ethical recruitment was framed as a matter of professional dignity, justice, and institutional responsibility.	<p>P1: Streamlined visa and employment procedures</p> <p>P7: Transparent fee and contract practices</p> <p>P9: Transparent recruitment</p> <p>P9: Realistic job previews and expectation statements for rural/tribal placements</p> <p>P10: Transparent recruitment practices that avoid exploitative fees</p>

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Theme 33	Teacher Well-Being, Workload, and Professional Recognition	<p>Teachers recommended mental health check-ins, peer support networks, reduced caseloads, co-planning time, and formal recognition of advanced qualifications and leadership potential. Well-being and professional affirmation were inseparable from teacher sustainability.</p>	<p>P1: Regular planning time, PD, emotional support, and recognition of advanced qualifications P2: Mental-health check-ins and peer mentorship for teachers far from home P12: Bilingual/language supports; family-engagement training; smaller caseloads P13: Smaller caseloads; co-planning access with general education teachers P15: Mentoring networks among international teachers; recognition of international credentials</p>
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Lived Experiences of Filipino Teachers in Indigenous School Communities

The first research question generated twenty (20) themes organized across four dimensions: lived cultural experiences (Themes 1 - 5), instructional and pedagogical strategies (Themes 6 - 10), professional challenges (Themes 11 - 15), and personal challenges and adaptations (Themes 16 - 20).

With respect to lived cultural experiences, findings revealed that Filipino teachers entered Navajo reservation schools as cultural immersants, encountering environments in which Indigenous language, clan relationships, land-based identity, and community rituals were woven into the daily rhythm of school life (Theme 1). Rather than experiencing this immersion solely as difference, participants identified resonances between Filipino values—such as *kapwa*, *bayanihan*, and *paggalang*—and Navajo principles of harmony, kinship, and environmental stewardship, which reduced social distance and facilitated relational adjustment (Theme 2). These cultural bridges enabled participants to adapt their pedagogy by situating instruction within Indigenous knowledge, community data, and local contexts (Theme 3). A sense of belonging was gradually constructed through active participation in community events, family engagement, and elder-inclusive school activities (Theme 4). Over time, participants described a developmental movement from initial cultural outsider status toward deeper participation, relational understanding, and culturally grounded professional identity (Theme 5).

With respect to instructional and pedagogical strategies, participants moved away from lecture-based approaches toward culturally responsive and contextualized instruction that linked academic content to students' everyday realities, local landscapes, and community knowledge systems (Theme 6). Cooperative and student-centered learning structures—including Kagan strategies, guided reading circles, and peer-teaching—were employed to promote active participation and relational learning (Theme 7). Land-based and experiential pedagogy, including project-based science units tied to local soil, water, and agriculture, grounded instruction in the environmental relationships central to Navajo identity (Theme 8). Differentiated and inclusive instructional frameworks, including Universal De-

sign for Learning (UDL) and co-teaching models, were used to accommodate diverse learner needs, language backgrounds, and exceptionalities (Theme 9). Culturally grounded literacy and language support—through Indigenous-author texts, bilingual word walls, and community storytelling—affirmed students' home cultures and enhanced engagement and literacy outcomes (Theme 10).

With respect to professional challenges, participants consistently reported that inconsistent student attendance driven by family responsibilities, livestock duties, and seasonal agricultural work disrupted instructional continuity and required flexible pedagogical responses (Theme 11). Limited instructional resources, inadequate technology infrastructure, and insufficient SPED staffing placed disproportionate burdens on classroom teachers (Theme 12). Linguistic and instructional adjustment challenges arose from transitions between the Philippine and US educational systems, including differences in curriculum standards, assessment formats, and language of instruction (Theme 13). Workload intensification and professional isolation—stemming from multi-subject assignments, IEP responsibilities, and geographic remoteness—affected sustainability and well-being (Theme 14). Recruitment- and visa-related burdens, including exploitative placement fees, prolonged processing timelines, and unclear contractual terms, compounded the professional and financial strain of deployment (Theme 15).

With respect to personal challenges and adaptations, participants experienced significant homesickness and emotional strain from separation from family, managed through digital communication and coping rituals (Theme 16). Rural isolation and environmental adjustment—including extreme weather, limited amenities, and geographic remoteness—required practical and psychological adaptation (Theme 17). Role strain arose from the competing demands of professional obligations, domestic responsibilities, and community expectations (Theme 18). Practical settlement challenges related to housing, transportation, banking, and daily living necessitated creative problem-solving and peer support (Theme 19). Resilience was ultimately sustained through a combination of faith, reflective practices, peer debriefing, gratitude routines, and a deep sense of vocational purpose (Theme 20).

For the second research question on the personal values and cultural beliefs that sustained resilience and identity reconstruction, the findings showed that participants drew strength from Filipino values, faith, peer support, reflective practice, and relational commitment. These resources enabled them to cope with professional isolation, emotional strain, and cultural transition while maintaining a sense of purpose and professional identity in their host schools.

Personal Values and Cultural Beliefs Filipino Teachers Utilize to Sustain Their Resilience and Navigate Identity Reconstruction in Their Host Schools

The second research question generated three (3) themes. Findings revealed that participants consistently drew upon core Filipino values—particularly *paglilingkod* (service), *paggalang* (respect), and *pakikipagkapwa* (shared humanity)—as moral and relational anchors that provided purpose, guided their relationships

with students and colleagues, and stabilized their professional identity amid adversity (Theme 21). These values were not merely abstract ideals but were enacted daily as principles of care, dignity, and communal responsibility that shaped how teachers understood and performed their roles in Indigenous school communities.

Faith, reflective practices, and community connection functioned as active resilience resources. Participants described sustaining their emotional well-being through prayer, journaling, gratitude practices, and structured peer debriefing within Filipino teacher cohorts (Theme 22). Community engagement—both within the Filipino diaspora and within Indigenous cultural life—provided social belonging and a renewed sense of purpose that buffered the effects of isolation and professional strain.

Identity reconstruction was facilitated by the cultural alignment participants perceived between Filipino values and Navajo philosophy, particularly the resonance between *pakikipagkapwa* and the Navajo concept of Hózhó (balance and harmony). Rather than experiencing a rupture between their Filipino identity and their role in an Indigenous community, participants actively reinterpreted their values within the new cultural context, arriving at a more expansive, culturally grounded, and professionally purposeful sense of self (Theme 23).

For the third research question on the roles and contributions of Filipino teachers to the academic and personal development of Indigenous students, the findings showed that participants functioned not only as classroom instructors but also as mentors, cultural bridge-builders, and community-oriented educators. Their contributions were expressed through culturally grounded teaching, differentiated support, trust-building with students and families, and efforts to connect classroom learning to community life and local knowledge.

Roles and Contributions of Filipino Teachers to the Academic and Personal Development of Indigenous Students

The third research question generated four (4) themes. Findings indicated that Filipino teachers described their primary role as that of cultural bridges and advocates, connecting global knowledge to local Indigenous wisdom, mediating between mainstream academic expectations and students' cultural identities, and modeling cross-cultural respect and perseverance (Theme 24). Their contributions extended beyond academic delivery to include the affirmation of language, the validation of Indigenous knowledge, and the creation of inclusive, culturally safe learning environments.

As facilitators of culturally relevant academic learning, participants integrated Indigenous contexts, community examples, and place-based frameworks into subject instruction, making academic content more accessible, meaningful, and identity-affirming for Indigenous learners (Theme 25). They also functioned as mentors of student confidence, aspiration, and identity, building self-belief, encouraging leadership, and expanding students' vision of future possibilities within and beyond the reservation (Theme 26). Beyond individual classrooms, partici-

pants contributed to school improvement and inclusive educational practice through peer mentoring, curriculum planning, data-driven initiatives, and programs ensuring that learners with disabilities and diverse needs were fully included and valued (Theme 27).

For the fourth research question on policy, preparation, and institutional support, the findings showed that participants valued structured onboarding, mentorship, culturally responsive orientation, professional development, and equitable access to resources. They emphasized that meaningful support systems are necessary for successful adjustment, sustained teaching effectiveness, and long-term retention in reservation-based schools.

Insights of Filipino Teachers Regarding Policy, Preparation, and Institutional Support for Cross-Cultural Teaching in Indigenous School Communities

The fourth research question generated six (6) themes. Participants unanimously emphasized that structured mentorship and induction programs—preferably pairing internationally recruited teachers with experienced Indigenous educator mentors—are essential for successful cultural adjustment, instructional effectiveness, and professional belonging (Theme 28). Generic or procedural orientation was viewed as insufficient; what was needed was a sustained, relational, and community-connected induction system extending through at least the first year of service.

Cultural and pedagogical preparation was identified as a pre-deployment institutional obligation. Participants called for training in land-based pedagogy, Indigenous educational philosophy, culturally sustaining practices, and the community relationships specific to reservation school contexts (Theme 29). Instructional resource and material support—including adequate classroom supplies, technology, and culturally relevant teaching materials—were consistently cited as necessary conditions for effective practice, given the resource inequities characteristic of BIE-governed schools (Theme 30).

Housing and rural-living assistance emerged as a practical necessity, with participants identifying the lack of affordable and accessible housing near remote schools as a significant source of stress and instability (Theme 31). Ethical recruitment and transparent employment processes—including the elimination of exploitative placement fees, clear contractual terms, and timely visa processing support—were identified as minimum conditions for professional dignity and sustained commitment (Theme 32). Finally, participants called for institutional recognition of their professional expertise and leadership potential, alongside non-stigmatizing psychosocial support frameworks that treat teacher well-being as a systemic responsibility rather than a personal matter (Theme 33).

For the fifth research question on the implications of the findings for educational management, the study showed that educational leaders in both Navajo reservation schools and the Philippine educational landscape should strengthen systems for international teacher preparation, intercultural mentoring, context-responsive pedagogy, and institutional support. The findings suggest that educa-

tional management must recognize that effective placement in Indigenous school settings depends not only on recruitment, but also on sustained cultural, professional, and organizational support.

Core Findings on the Implications for Educational Management

The study identifies twenty themes across four research questions, centered on teachers' cultural adjustment, classroom practices, professional struggles, resilience, and policy recommendations. A central finding is that Filipino teachers began as cultural outsiders with limited knowledge of Navajo language, kinship, and community norms, yet many gradually became more culturally responsive through self-directed adaptation rather than formal institutional support.

Another key finding is that teaching became more effective when lessons were grounded in students' lived realities, such as land-based science, culturally relevant literacy materials, bilingual supports, and cooperative learning structures. The document shows that culturally contextualized pedagogy improved engagement more than decontextualized instruction and should be treated as a core instructional approach, not an optional enrichment practice.

Student Learning Conditions. The findings show that attendance was a major structural challenge, with participants reporting that many students were frequently absent because of family work, livestock care, agricultural demands, and community obligations. The document interprets this not as simple disengagement, but as the result of broader social, cultural, and economic realities shaping participation in schooling.

The study also found substantial learner diversity in classrooms, including students with IEPs, English learners, bilingual learners, and students with varied academic readiness. Teachers responded with differentiated instruction, UDL-based strategies, scaffolds, visual supports, and SPED collaboration, but these practices were often dependent on individual teacher effort rather than schoolwide systems.

Teacher Challenges. A major finding is that reservation schools faced persistent resource inequities, including weak internet, outdated devices, limited instructional materials, insufficient housing, teacher shortages, and restricted access to professional development. These conditions increased workload, weakened instructional quality, and contributed to instability in staffing and program delivery.

The study also highlights the heavy burdens carried by internationally recruited Filipino teachers, including recruitment debt, visa uncertainty, homesickness, climate adjustment, rural isolation, remittance pressure, and overlapping academic or family responsibilities. Despite these pressures, participants remained in their roles by drawing on faith, peer support, reflection, and a strong sense of vocation.

Cultural and Policy Insights. An important finding is that Filipino cultural values such as *paglilingkod*, *paggalang*, and *pakikipagkapwa* aligned meaningfully with the Navajo principle of *Hózhó*, helping teachers build respectful and relational practice. The document treats this cultural alignment as a professional asset rather than a background trait, suggesting that Filipino identity itself helped sustain culturally responsive teaching.

For the Philippine context, the file concludes that teacher education and policy systems should strengthen cross-cultural preparation, pre-departure orientation, psychosocial support, ethical recruitment safeguards, and recognition of diaspora teachers' expertise. It also argues that lessons learned from Navajo reservation schools can inform Indigenous Peoples' Education in the Philippines, especially in culturally grounded pedagogy, resilience preparation, and mentorship systems.

The findings show that Filipino teachers in Navajo reservation schools can teach effectively across cultures, but their success depends too heavily on personal resilience rather than structured support, making cultural orientation, inclusive systems, resource equity, mentorship, and ethical teacher deployment urgent management priorities.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the participant group consisted exclusively of Filipino teachers working in BIE and tribally controlled schools serving Navajo Nation communities. As such, the findings do not include the perspectives of students, families, school leaders, or other community stakeholders whose voices could have provided a broader and more relational understanding of cross-cultural teaching and community engagement in these settings.

Second, the inquiry was conducted in four specific schools in Navajo Nation communities in New Mexico, U.S.A. Although these sites offered rich and contextually grounded accounts of transnational teaching in Indigenous school settings, the findings are necessarily site-specific and should not be generalized uncritically to other reservation schools, Indigenous communities, rural districts, or international teacher-placement contexts.

Third, as a narrative inquiry, the study relied on participants' self-reported and retrospective accounts of experience. These narratives provided depth and meaning; however, they were also shaped by memory, interpretation, and the relational dynamics of the interview and reflection process. Despite the use of reflexive memoing, peer debriefing, member-checking, and an audit trail to strengthen trustworthiness, the analysis remains interpretive in nature.

Future research may extend this work by incorporating the perspectives of Navajo students, parents, school leaders, and community representatives to build a more holistic account of culturally responsive and relationally grounded teaching in Indigenous school contexts. Comparative studies across other Indigenous-serving schools, as well as investigations of institutional preparation, induction, and long-term retention of internationally recruited teachers, may also deepen understanding of how cross-cultural educators can be supported more effectively in high-need settings.

4. Conclusions

Drawn in alignment with the five research questions, the conclusions synthesize

the lived experiences, values, roles, insights, and educational management implications that emerged from the narratives of fifteen Filipino teachers in Bureau of Indian Education and tribally controlled schools in the Navajo Nation.

First, Filipino teachers' lived experiences in Indigenous school communities were complex processes of cultural adjustment, professional adaptation, and relational learning rather than simple overseas employment transitions.

Second, their resilience and identity reconstruction were sustained by deeply rooted cultural values—relationality, respect, perseverance, reciprocity, faith, and professional commitment—indicating that resilience in cross-cultural teaching is a culturally grounded, relationally supported process rather than a purely individual trait.

Third, participants' roles and contributions extended far beyond classroom instruction; they acted as cultural bridge-builders, mentors, advocates of student confidence, and facilitators of inclusive and culturally meaningful learning, contributing to identity affirmation and trust-building in their host schools.

Fourth, their insights on policy, preparation, and institutional support point to the need for comprehensive, coordinated systems that prepare teachers before deployment, support them materially and emotionally during service, and recognize their professional worth.

Finally, the findings imply that educational management in both Navajo reservation and Philippine contexts must move beyond recruitment toward culturally responsive, ethically grounded, and structurally supportive systems that enable internationally recruited teachers to contribute meaningfully to Indigenous learners and to the broader transformation of education across contexts.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered for the Navajo Reservation School context, the Philippine educational landscape, and future research.

For Navajo Reservation Schools. Reservation schools should institutionalize structured cultural orientation programs co-designed with Navajo educators, elders, and community leaders; establish intercultural mentorship that pairs internationally recruited teachers with Indigenous cultural mentors distinct from instructional supervisors; integrate land-based, culturally sustaining pedagogy as a core curricular expectation; and ensure equitable resource provision, housing, and rural-living support to reduce isolation and stabilize staffing.

For the Philippine Educational Landscape. Teacher-education institutions should strengthen pre-service and in-service preparation for cross-cultural and Indigenous-context teaching, incorporating cultural intelligence, intercultural communication, and Indigenous Peoples Education. DepEd, CHED, and PRC should recognize international and cross-cultural teaching experience as a source of advanced professional competence and create pathways for credentialing, reintegration, and policy contribution by returning teachers. Agencies regulating overseas

employment should establish safeguards against excessive placement fees and exploitative recruitment.

For Future Research. Future studies may extend this inquiry by including the perspectives of Indigenous students, families, and school leaders; comparing Filipino teachers' experiences across different Indigenous reservation contexts; and examining longitudinal outcomes of cross-cultural induction programs, mentorship structures, and culturally sustaining pedagogy on teacher retention and student learning.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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