

Transition Experiences of Filipino Licensed Professionals from Non-Academic Practice to Academic Practice in the Eastern Province of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the experiences of Filipino licensed professionals transitioning from non-academic to academic roles in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, focusing on the reasons for their move, challenges faced, cultural aspects, satisfaction with their new positions, and intentions within the educational sphere. This study examined the transition of Filipino professionals to teaching roles in Saudi Arabia, using interpretivism and phenomenology to explore their lived experiences. Interpretivism helps understand their cultural and professional shifts, while phenomenology uncovers how they perceive their identity transformation. The research, based on in-depth interviews, highlights challenges like cultural adaptation and acculturation. Nine participants with diverse backgrounds were purposively selected for their insights. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were integral to the study. The findings offer valuable perspectives on the career transition process, providing insights into the emotional and transformative journey of Filipino teachers in Saudi Arabia's academic setting.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Transition experiences, Academic practice, Saudi Arabia, Filipino licensed non-teaching professionals

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of career change, particularly for Filipino non-teaching professionals transitioning into teaching roles in non-Christian countries, requires a focused examination within the context of migration, professional identity, and societal impact. The teaching profession is often seen as rewarding, though challenging, requiring a combination of both hard and soft skills, including communication, flexibility, and self-improvement. However, for Filipino professionals, shifting from non-academic careers, such as accounting or healthcare, to teaching presents profound changes, involving not only new job roles but also the transformation of professional identity, purpose, and belonging (Ang & Tionson, 2023).

This career transition, especially to teaching in non-Christian countries like Saudi Arabia, is more than just a job change; it reflects a complex adjustment to new cultural and educational systems. In the case of Filipino teachers in Saudi Arabia, the transition is marked by overcoming language barriers, cultural differences, and unfamiliar educational expectations (Aben, 2023). Despite the challenges, the move to teaching offers these professionals opportunities for personal growth, cultural exposure, and the chance to address social inequalities through education (Knapp et al., 2023).

The global demand for qualified educators, particularly in regions like the Middle East, highlights the critical role of Filipino migrants in filling educational gaps due to shortages of trained professionals (Tanpoco, 2014; International Organization for Migration, 2023). The trend of migrating for career advancement, including teaching, has been ongoing since the 1960s and continues to reshape the identities of Filipino migrants (Brazas, 2023; Boquet, 2017). This migration and career shift are influenced not only by economic factors, such as better income and working conditions, but also by the desire to contribute to society through education (Siostron et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

However, the experiences of Filipino professionals undergoing this career change remain underexplored, particularly regarding the emotional and professional reconfiguration required when transitioning into teaching. The study aimed to fill this gap by examining the motivations, challenges, and coping mechanisms of Filipino professionals who switch careers and teaching roles in a particular non-Christian country. By exploring these transitions, the research aimed to understand the broader implications of such career changes for both the individuals involved and the educational systems they join, ultimately contributing to the design of support programs and policies to ease this transition (Schwartz & Dori, 2020).

The research sought to explore the lived experiences of Filipino professionals transitioning from non-academic roles in healthcare, engineering, and accountancy to academic positions in Saudi Arabia. This phenomenological study aimed to understand how these professionals navigated the complex challenges associated with cultural adaptation, credential recognition, and the acquisition of new academic skills (Newton et al., 2012). By focusing on the subjective experiences of these individuals, the study sought to capture the essence of their transition, providing insights into the emotional, psychological, and practical aspects of this career shift.

The central objective was to gain a deeper understanding of the personal and professional transformations that Filipino professionals undergo during this transition. This approach helped to reveal how these professionals constructed meaning from their experiences, how they adapted to the academic environment, and how these changes impacted their integration and job satisfaction in the Saudi Arabian educational system. Ultimately, the study aimed to improve the support systems for these professionals by exploring the support mechanisms, such as mentorship and professional development, that facilitated their transition, contributing to their growth and the effectiveness of the academic community in which they worked. However, the study had limitations, including geographical constraints, reliance on self-reported data, cultural differences, and time limitations. Despite these, the research aimed to offer a deeper understanding of this transition and inform policy recommendations and future research.

Philosophical Underpinning

Saudi Arabia presented significant opportunities for Filipino professionals, not merely in terms of career advancement but also in how they perceived themselves and their work. Their relocation was a journey that involved both internal and external transformation—beyond adopting new pedagogical techniques or interacting with diverse students, it also entailed understanding the underlying spirit of the education system. This study explored how Filipino professionals adjusted to their new academic roles, considering the impact of these shifts on their Dasein (being), their authentic self in the world of academia.

The research examined how education in KSA influenced these professionals' essence and authenticity, focusing on their acculturation and assimilation processes, the structures they encountered, and their navigation within these new environments. It applied Heidegger's notions of 'Being-in-the-world' to investigate how the transition to an academic role in a foreign cultural context shaped their identities and their professional lives. This study highlighted how professionals negotiated their new roles in an unfamiliar system, exploring both the 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' ways they integrated their past selves with their emerging academic identities.

Heidegger's concept of 'thrownness' (Geworfenheit) illuminated the dislocation these professionals experienced as they adapted to the academic context in Saudi Arabia. Their sense of identity and subjectivity was influenced not only by their professional environment but also by the cultural and social structures they encountered. This process of negotiation shaped their experience and understanding of their new academic roles.

METHODOLOGY

In the study of Filipino professionals transitioning to academic roles in Saudi Arabia, both interpretivism and phenomenology provide the framework for exploring their subjective experiences. Interpretivism focuses on understanding how these professionals make sense of their new roles and navigate cultural and professional shifts, considering their unique cultural backgrounds and personal perspectives (Schwartz, 2020).

Phenomenology, on the other hand, emphasizes the lived experiences of the participants, aiming to uncover how they perceive and adapt to the changes in their professional identity and environment (Heidegger, 1927/1962). The study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews to capture the rich, contextualized realities of these professionals (Creswell, 2013). This approach allows for a deep exploration of cultural adaptation, identity transformation, and professional integration. Through qualitative methods, the study seeks to offer valuable insights into the complex processes these professionals undergo as they adjust to a new academic environment, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by skilled migrants in academic contexts (Walsh & De Joseph, 2003).

In the context of phenomenology, the study of Filipino licensed professionals transitioning to teaching roles in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (EP-KSA) is justified as it seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences of the participants, focusing on the essence of their transition process. Phenomenology emphasizes the subjective interpretation of individuals' experiences, aiming to uncover how they perceive and make sense of significant life changes. The transition from non-academic practice to teaching roles is a profound shift in professional identity, which can be influenced by various socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. By studying Filipino professionals within the specific context of EP-KSA, where traditional Saudi culture intersects with foreign influences, the research delves into the participants' unique perspectives and the meanings they attach to their experiences in a new academic setting. The use of purposive sampling ensures that the participants are those who have undergone this transition, and through in-depth interviews, the study captures the richness of their personal accounts, aligning with the phenomenological aim of revealing the essence of their lived experiences. The research does not merely focus on the external changes they experience but seeks to understand the internal, personal processes—how these professionals navigate cultural adaptation, identity transformation, and acculturation. This phenomenological approach provides valuable insights into how Filipino teachers interpret their evolving roles and the significance of their professional transitions in the unique context of Saudi Arabia's educational landscape.

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of participants in the study, including their age, years of non-academic and academic practice, and professional licensure. The participants, who are Filipino licensed professionals working in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (EP-KSA), have diverse professional backgrounds, including chemical engineering, respiratory therapy, nursing, and teaching. The data was collected through an online survey, followed by in-depth interviews conducted via Zoom. The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who were specifically involved in the transition from non-academic to academic roles in EP-KSA. This technique ensured that the participants were qualified and had unique insights into the research topic, thus enriching the study with diverse perspectives on the transition process, as explained by Palinkas et al. (2015).

Table 1 Participants' Demographic Profile

#	Participant	Age	Years of Non-Academic Practice	Years of Academic Practice	Professional Licensure
1	Red	59	14	22	Chemical Engineer
2	Brown	52	9	20	Chemical Engineer
3	Dahlia	40	2	10	Professional Teacher
4	White	52	10	20	Respiratory Therapist
5	Daisy	40	6	6	Registered Nurse/ Professional Teacher
6	Rose	50	7	22	Respiratory Therapist
7	Grey	54	10	19	Electrical Engineer
8	Black	43	5	15	Registered Nurse
9	Jasmine	57	17	18	Registered Nurse

The study used purposive sampling to select participants who were likely to have valuable insights into the phenomenon of transitioning from non-academic to academic practice. This sampling method ensured that only Filipino licensed professionals teaching in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (EP-KSA) were chosen. Participants were carefully screened to ensure their experiences aligned with the research questions, and

selection criteria were met. The approach aimed to gather diverse perspectives from individuals with unique experiences related to the transition, thereby enriching the study's findings (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Phenomenological research differs from grounded theory in its approach to sample size. While grounded theory emphasizes data collection until "saturation" is reached (i.e., no new themes emerge) (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), phenomenology prioritizes in-depth exploration of a smaller number of participants to understand the essence of their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The focus shifts from accumulating data to achieving a rich and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

This qualitative study, which utilized thematic analysis to explore the career transition process of nine Filipino licensed professionals moving into teaching in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, prioritized ethical considerations throughout the research. The participants, who came from diverse professional backgrounds, underwent significant changes in both their careers and cultural contexts. Their reflections on career advancement, adaptation to a new education system, and personal growth were collected in two phases: an initial written response via Google Forms, followed by semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom.

In analyzing data, the researcher avoided making comparisons between datasets as is common in comparative studies. Heideggerian phenomenology emphasizes the unique and situated nature of individual existence. Therefore, while some argue that comparisons can offer insights, excessive focus on comparing participants in phenomenological research can obscure the unique and situated nature of each individual's lived experience. This is because direct comparisons may inadvertently impose external frameworks and overlook the crucial influence of historical, social, and cultural contexts on individual experiences.

The study emphasized the importance of ethical practices, including informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity, which were critical in safeguarding both the integrity of the research and the participants. Informed consent was obtained by fully disclosing the study's aims, procedures, risks, and benefits, ensuring participants could withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the data and restricting access to sensitive information. Cultural sensitivity was key, as the researcher was mindful of social mechanisms, communication norms, and personal comfort levels, which were particularly important given the cultural diversity of the participants. Reflexivity was also employed, where the researcher acknowledged personal biases and their potential impact on the study. Transparency in the research process ensured that all methods, data collection, and analysis were openly communicated.

These ethical considerations not only enriched the study's outcomes but also ensured that the rights and values of the participants were upheld. The findings, which showcased the emotional and transformative journeys of the participants, provided valuable insights for individuals considering similar career transitions and highlighted the strength and resilience involved in reinventing oneself through teaching. The study's implications for policy, practice, and future research reinforce the importance of teaching in shaping lifelong learning.

RESULTS

Summary of Red's Lived Experiences

Career Transition and Motivation. Red highlighted his struggles as a fresh graduate, as he recalled, "Imagine, right? The frustration of a fresh graduate, first job, and only after a month, you're already out of work." His eventual shift to teaching marked a turning point: "I had an opportunity to (enter academia)... I applied. And, fortunately, (I was) accepted."

Challenges and Adaptation. Red included balancing work and education, as he shared, "I resigned from my job again, so I went full-time until I finished my thesis." Adapting to cultural differences was also significant: "Behaviorally, the behavior of the students here is more intense compared to the Philippines."

Intrinsic Motivation and Fulfillment. Red drove his teaching journey, rooted in his desire for meaningful work: "Because it is more relevant, you can see the application of what you have studied." His Teaching

Philosophy evolved from focusing solely on knowledge sharing— “At the start of my teaching career... I just really wanted to share knowledge. But I didn’t care if they failed”—to prioritizing values: “I want to impart values to them... not only their education but also their lives.”

Support Systems and Community. Red played a vital role, with Red consulting experienced colleagues: “Of course, with the faculty members... I consult with them as well. And there are also trainings.” He humorously admitted his early reliance on peers: “Before, I didn’t know how to use slides... So, you know? I just borrowed from my co-teachers back then.”

Cultural Differences and Adaptation. Red highlighted the complexities of teaching in a multicultural environment: “Inside the classroom, they were punching each other... But... even if their noses bleed, after that, they would hug each other, as if nothing happened.” These experiences enriched his resilience and perspective on growth.

Summary of Brown’s Lived Experiences

Professional Identity and Respect. Brown’s transition to academia was driven by a desire for recognition and a meaningful professional identity. As the only Filipino in his workplace, he reflected, “I was about to leave the company because I’m the only one Filipino in the plant.” His respect for teaching was inspired by his mother, a high school teacher: “I’ve seen how the teaching profession is respected in our community.” These experiences fueled his pursuit of growth and purpose in his career.

Experiential Learning and Teaching. Brown’s industry background played a critical role in shaping his teaching style, especially when working with special industry students. He explained, “Although I am a laboratory assistant for regular students, the department gave me a job to teach special trainees because I have industry experience.” His emphasis on excellence was clear: “You have to show them that you are very capable.” His approach highlights the integration of practical experience with reflective teaching to ensure quality education.

Cultural Challenges and Adaptation. As a Filipino teacher, Brown faced cultural stereotypes but overcame them through competence and resilience. He shared, “Yeah, the first impression. Oh, you’re a Filipino. So how could you become a teacher?” He confronted this bias head-on, stating, “But you have to show them how good you are.” These experiences strengthened his professional identity and earned him respect in the academic community.

Institutional Dynamics and Roles. Navigating institutional structures was vital in Brown’s transition to academia in Saudi Arabia. He started in a supportive role: “I did not start as an instructor but as an assistant in the lab. They promised me I would get it very soon.” He adapted to diverse learner needs, observing, “They process regular students but also have industrial students.” His ability to address varied student profiles and navigate institutional expectations showcases his adaptability.

Professional Recognition and Achievement in Career Growth. Recognition and career milestones played a pivotal role in Brown’s journey. He proudly recounted a major achievement: “Out of so many colleagues, I was chosen to represent the department [to approve training materials in Australia].” Reflecting on this moment, he said, “It’s a proud moment for yourself.” Such achievements not only boosted his motivation but also emphasized the value of acknowledgment in fostering career satisfaction.

Summary of Dahlia’s Lived Experiences

Motivation and Transition to Teaching. Driven by financial constraints, Dahlia transitioned to teaching to support her household. Initially, it was not her preferred profession: “I was not interested to teach during that time, but then the only opportunity that I had.” Despite this, she embraced the role, stating, “When I came to submit my resume, they offered me the teaching position.” Her journey highlights how necessity can lead to unexpected yet fulfilling career paths.

Learning and Teaching – Issues and Strategy. Lacking formal training in education, Dahlia faced challenges in her new role. She admitted, “I have the heart or the passion for teaching, but then the strategies, the techniques, the theoretical aspects, I don’t have.” Over time, she developed strategies to meet her students’ needs, underscoring the importance of professional growth and adaptability in overcoming systemic challenges.

Impact of Non-Academic Experience. Dahlia’s sales and marketing background proved valuable in teaching. “In the sales and marketing industry, we are people-oriented,” she shared. This skill helped her connect with students, including a dyslexic child she supported in reading. Her experience illustrates how skills from other fields can enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

Cultural and Educational Differences. Adapting to the educational culture in Saudi Arabia required Dahlia to navigate cultural norms, such as announcing tests in advance. “It’s not the culture here in Saudi Arabia. You should, like, at least announce ahead of time,” she explained. Her experience highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity in international teaching environments.

Holistic Teaching Philosophy. Dahlia emphasized character development alongside academics: “It doesn’t matter if you are very good in academics. If your character fails, you won’t teach kids moral values.” Her holistic approach fosters both academic success and moral growth, resonating with students and parents alike.

Faith and Resilience. Faith was central to Dahlia’s resilience during challenges. “I really prayed every time before I sleep and when I wake up,” she shared. Her spirituality provided strength and guidance, showcasing the role of personal convictions in navigating career transitions.

Summary of White’s Lived Experiences

Re-envisioning Career. White successfully transitioned from a clinical background to academia, emphasizing the value of practical application in education. He stated, “Basically, the work is classified as an applied medical science, an allied health profession, so involved in patient care.” This highlights his belief in the importance of real-world experience in the learning process.

Cultural Challenges and Adaptation. Teaching in Saudi Arabia presented cultural challenges, particularly regarding gender norms and language barriers. White shared his initial struggles, especially with teaching women: “Because it’s not allowed!” and the language difficulties: “Students are not really yet adept to English, compared to nowadays.” This underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptation for effective teaching in a foreign context.

Professional Confidence and Competence. White’s confidence in his knowledge and ability to handle challenging situations played a vital role in his success. He expressed, “I am confident in my knowledge. If I am prepared, then I have the experience,” reflecting the importance of self-assurance in delivering high-quality education.

Recognition and Respect. Despite initial stereotypes, White earned the respect and recognition of colleagues and the wider healthcare community in Saudi Arabia. He shared how his reputation as “the quality man” spread among colleagues: “And that’s where I was known at the university. When you mention Sir -----, oh, the quality man, he knows quality.” This highlights the significance of acknowledgment and respect in achieving professional success.

Enthusiasm in Teaching and Internal Drives. White’s deep passion for teaching, coupled with a commitment to continuous improvement, significantly influenced his dedication to student success. He recalled, “Really, even before I graduate, I was already telling our dean that I want to teach in our college,” reflecting a long-standing commitment to education. His humility and desire for continuous improvement were captured in his statement: “I always say no, I’m not the best. Maybe there’s someone better than me, but the thing is I have to, you know, always do my best to give you the learning.” This underscores the positive impact of a passionate and dedicated teacher on student performance and the overall learning experience.

Summary of Daisy's Lived Experiences

Career Transition and Challenges. Daisy's journey began with a desire for a change, driven by "30 plus thousand pesos" and family support. However, the transition from nursing to teaching presented significant challenges, including grappling with "educational terminology" and struggling with classroom management to the point where she contemplated, "I wanted to go back to being a nurse."

Overcoming Obstacles. Despite these initial hurdles, Daisy persevered. She actively sought professional development opportunities, recognizing the need to "practice what I've learned... to see if I've improved the struggles." This continuous learning allowed her to effectively navigate classroom management challenges and create a more conducive learning environment.

Leveraging Clinical Expertise. Daisy's prior clinical experience proved to be a significant asset in her teaching. She effectively integrated "real-life" scenarios into her lessons, captivating students with her expertise. Students were "amazed by those things" as she connected theoretical concepts to practical applications, enhancing their learning and engagement.

Navigating Teacher-Student Relationships. Building strong relationships with students was crucial for Daisy's teaching approach. However, finding the balance between support and authority presented challenges. She acknowledged, "If you are scared of your students, you will not be a teacher, but you will be an adviser," highlighting the importance of self-efficacy and clear boundaries in fostering a respectful and productive learning environment.

Summary of Rose's Lived Experiences

Motivation for Transition. Rose's decision to transition from clinical practice to academia was influenced by several factors, including her parents' recommendation to relocate to Saudi Arabia. She also acknowledged the significant role of family in her career choices, noting, "During the millennial, my parents were here in Saudi Arabia." The support and recognition she received from patients and superiors further fueled her growth, with Rose acknowledging, "I have seen the potential within myself...my relationship with them" as a source of professional confidence and motivation.

Navigating Challenges. The transition to academia presented several challenges. Rose noted stark differences between the clinical and academic environments, stating, "In the clinic, it's more on a bedside, right? After your duty, it's done." Cultural and language barriers also posed significant challenges, particularly in communication with both patients and students, as she observed, "Oh, it is very challenging... we know that the language barriers there."

Innovations in Teaching. To address these challenges and enhance student learning, Rose implemented several innovative strategies. She spearheaded the development of "five clinical practice course manuals from the scratch" and emphasized the importance of clear and structured communication with students, advising, "You have to be habba-habba...step-by-step." These initiatives reflect her commitment to improving the quality of education and adapting teaching methods to meet student needs.

Fulfillment and Personal Growth. Rose expressed a strong sense of fulfillment from witnessing the growth of her students and the overall enhancement of the respiratory care program at the university, stating, "It's very fulfilling because it raises the level of respiratory care and the university." However, she also acknowledged the importance of work-life balance and self-care, particularly during periods of intense academic activity, explaining, "Before, I said...that's the time when you will feel burnout." This highlights the importance of self-reflection and maintaining a healthy balance to prevent burnout and ensure long-term career satisfaction.

Summary of Grey's Lived Experiences

Transition Motivation and Challenges. Grey's transition to teaching was motivated by a combination of factors, including encouragement from his dean ("There's no such work that I can. So, my, my, my dean was calling me, they called me, and then, okay, you can teach, just come here.") and the desire to escape the

demanding conditions of his previous role in the industry ("It's so very hard to work there because you've been working, like, eight hours... And it's so hot outside."). However, he also faced challenges in transitioning, particularly in developing educational materials, noting, "It was hard for me to make a book. It takes me like a month to form a book, one book for the students." This highlights the significant time and effort required to adapt to the demands of academic life.

Integrating Industry Experience in Teaching. Grey leveraged his industry experience to enhance student learning, stating, "When I teach, I can really, I can share it to them what I have experienced in the company." He incorporated "practical electrical exercises" such as electrical wiring and circuits, aligning his teaching with the concept of "real-world learning" and bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Cultural Adaptation and Relationship Management. Teaching in Saudi Arabia presented cultural challenges, particularly in understanding and navigating student attitudes. Grey observed, "So, I got shocked about their culture. Because they are Arab people and you don't know their characters or attitudes towards teachers." He also recognized the importance of building rapport with students, noting, "The students love the teachers, especially for the Filipino teachers. Why? Because we are kind, we are, you know, it's our culture that to help people." This highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity and understanding in fostering effective teacher-student relationships.

Personal Satisfaction and Student Success. Grey derived immense personal satisfaction from witnessing his students' success. He expressed joy over their career achievements, stating, "I am so happy to have students that they got the position in the company. So, it's our pleasure as a teacher to know what's going on after they graduate here in our university." This emphasizes the intrinsic rewards of teaching and the importance of mentoring students in their career development.

Contributions to the Academic Environment. Grey actively participated in curriculum development, stating, "We were the ones who made our curriculums. I was one of the members of the curriculum and then also the one also making lesson plans." His contributions helped standardize teaching methods within the institution, with "many people are already using those lesson plans that we did." This highlights the importance of faculty involvement in curriculum development and the impact of their contributions on the overall quality of education within the institution.

Summary of Black's Lived Experiences

Motivation and Grounds for Transition. Black's transition to teaching was primarily driven by the competitive nature of the nursing job market in the Philippines. Faced with an oversupply of nurses and the question, "How can I sell myself if we have the same qualifications?", they began exploring alternative career paths. Initially hesitant, as they "didn't imagine being a teacher before," Black recognized the potential of teaching as a viable and fulfilling career option. This highlights how external factors and a proactive approach to career exploration can lead to significant career shifts.

Cultural and Gender Adaptation in Teaching. Teaching in Saudi Arabia presented unique cultural and gender-related challenges. Black recalled, "How can I deal with this?" when faced with the prospect of teaching male students. However, they effectively leveraged their expertise in Obstetrics, noting, "They don't have experience in the OB field. So, that is my advantage as a Filipino nurse." This demonstrates the importance of recognizing and adapting to cultural nuances and leveraging existing expertise to create an inclusive and effective learning environment.

Leveraging Practical Experience in Teaching. Black emphasized the significance of incorporating real-world experience into their teaching. They shared, "I can share my experience with the students and your first-hand experience," and highlighted the importance of hands-on learning, stating, "I trained myself to stay in the operating room for the first ten days." This approach underscores the value of practical experience in enhancing teaching effectiveness and providing students with a comprehensive understanding of their chosen field.

Impact of Student Success on Educator Fulfillment. Witnessing their students succeed was a source of immense satisfaction for Black. They expressed, "That's the joy of your teachers when they see their former students prosper in the field that they wanted to go." The continued relationship with former students further reinforced their sense of accomplishment, demonstrating the profound impact of educators on the lives of their students.

Challenges in Curriculum Development and Technological Adaptation. Black encountered challenges in adapting to the demands of academic life, particularly in curriculum development. They likened their initial experience to that of an apprentice, stating, "Here is the syllabus, okay? From the syllabus, you have to build your lectures from it." While access to materials eventually made teaching easier, adapting to new technologies presented further challenges. They recalled, "They have the smartboard; I don't have the smartboard back home." This highlights the importance of ongoing professional development and access to resources to support educators in navigating the evolving technological landscape of education.

Summary of Jasmine's Lived Experiences

Career Transition and Motivations. Jasmine's career path took an unexpected turn from accountancy to nursing education. While initially drawn to the medical field ("when I was still small, I really want to become either a nurse or a doctor"), a "bridging course" provided the opportunity to pursue her passion. This transition was further motivated by a desire to work abroad, specifically in the United States ("I want to go out in America"). Jasmine emphasized the importance of passion in career choices, stating, "Everything will be easy. Even in nursing, I'm telling the students, even not yet in the nursing, if you love your profession, whatever it is." This highlights the significant role of personal interest and ambition in shaping career trajectories.

Intrinsic Motivation and Fulfillment. Intrinsic motivation played a crucial role in Jasmine's success as a nurse educator. She emphasized the importance of "loving the teaching, love your work," stating, "So just be compassionate, love the teaching." Witnessing her students' success provided immense fulfillment, with Jasmine expressing, "It's worth for me to see that most of my students are successful in anywhere in the world." This highlights the intrinsic rewards of teaching and the importance of finding fulfillment in contributing to the growth of others.

Challenges and Adaptation. Jasmine encountered several challenges in her role as a nurse educator, particularly in motivating students in Saudi Arabia. She observed, "The only difference is the students, the behavior, how they, how we can achieve that the students will come up." Cultural differences and language barriers presented significant obstacles, requiring her to adapt her teaching style and "make the lectures easy for them, you know, not too English." This highlights the importance of flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability in navigating the challenges of teaching in diverse settings.

Philosophy and Strategies of Teaching. Jasmine's teaching philosophy is rooted in compassion and empathy. She emphasized a nurturing approach to students, stating, "So, and then one by one, every day, talk to them. It's just like a motherly approach." She stressed the importance of creating a supportive learning environment, recognizing that students may have "psychologically, or the learner is emotionally weak and may be traumatized." This nurturing approach aligns with research that emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment to enhance student engagement and success.

DISCUSSION

The lived experiences shared by participants like Red, Brown, Black, Grey, White, Daisy, Rose, Dahlia, and Jasmine provide valuable insights into the challenges, motivations, teaching philosophies, and adaptations they face across various fields.

Common Threads

Many Filipino professionals transitioned from non-academic careers, such as industrial engineering, into teaching due to job market competition and a desire for more fulfilling careers. Despite initial reluctance to

enter teaching, the global teacher shortage presented an opportunity for these professionals, and personal factors such as family and education level played a role in their decision. Motivated by the potential to impact future generations, many professionals found teaching to be a meaningful way to make a difference (UNESCO, 2023).

Teaching in culturally conservative countries like Saudi Arabia posed unique challenges, particularly related to gender segregation and cultural norms. Expatriate teachers had to adapt their pedagogy to fit local customs, maintaining professionalism while respecting cultural sensitivities. This required a deep understanding of the culture and a careful reconsideration of how to engage with students in a way that was both effective and respectful (Dousin & Sulong, 2021). Understanding and respecting these cultural norms was crucial for integrating into the teaching environment and fostering positive relationships with students and colleagues.

Many of these professionals also leveraged their real-world experiences in their teaching, finding that sharing real-life scenarios greatly enriched the learning process. This approach bridged the gap between theory and practice, making lessons more relevant and engaging for students, while preparing them for the workforce (Aarrevaara et al., 2021). The joy these educators experienced from seeing their students succeed in their careers, whether as directors, nurses, or managers, reinforced their sense of fulfillment. Witnessing their students' achievements validated their career switch and gave them a profound sense of purpose (Hocar, 2020).

However, the transition into teaching was not without its challenges. New teachers, particularly those without instructional design training, struggled with curriculum development and adapting to technology in the classroom. Many faced issues with limited resources and had to create their own materials or adjust existing lesson plans to fit the curriculum. This highlighted the need for professional development and support, as adequate training is essential to address the complexities of teaching and to ensure educators are well-prepared to meet the demands of modern classrooms (Feszterová, 2024).

Core Themes

The core theme of this study centers around the empowerment of teachers across disciplines through their intrinsic passion for teaching, their resilience in overcoming challenges, and their use of adaptive pedagogies to meet diverse student needs. Participants in the study, including Red, Brown, Black, Grey, White, Daisy, Rose, Dahlia, and Jasmine, each exemplify how their commitment to education, despite the obstacles they face, shapes their teaching practices and student outcomes.

Passion for Teaching is a central theme that emerged in the experiences of most participants. Whether through a profound desire to make a difference in students' lives or a commitment to fostering intellectual curiosity, teachers like Jasmine expressed how loving their profession fuels their sense of purpose. Jasmine, for example, noted that "everything will be easy" when one loves the profession. This passion is not only motivational for the teachers but also plays a key role in inspiring students to succeed.

Resilience emerged as another key theme, with teachers demonstrating the ability to persist despite difficulties such as language barriers, cultural diversity, and student disengagement. For instance, teachers working in international contexts like Jasmine in Saudi Arabia faced challenges like "motivating reluctant learners" and adjusting to new cultural environments. These experiences highlight how educators build resilience through trial and error, constantly adapting to ensure effective teaching and student success. Black's experience of overcoming personal and professional challenges illustrates the deep resilience needed to continue teaching, even when faced with immense stress.

The **Adaptive Pedagogies** theme focuses on how teachers adjust their methods and strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. From adjusting lesson plans to accommodate different learning styles, to creating supportive classroom environments, the participants highlighted the importance of flexibility in teaching. For example, Rose emphasized the need for a personalized approach in her classroom, ensuring each student's unique learning needs were addressed, while Dahlia noted that adapting her teaching to student feedback was crucial for sustained engagement and academic progress.

This study revealed that **teacher empowerment** is driven by a combination of passion, resilience, and adaptive pedagogies. These factors enable teachers to navigate the challenges they face, inspire their students, and create positive learning environments that support diverse student populations. As highlighted by participants across disciplines, the lived experiences of educators reflect a commitment to growth, flexibility, and a deep connection to the value of education.

The interrelationship between the core themes of passion, resilience, and the ability to adapt pedagogically plays a crucial role in fostering student success. Teachers who embody these qualities not only enhance their own professional development but also create enriching learning environments that cater to diverse student needs, leading to improved academic outcomes.

Interrelationship Between the Core Themes

The interrelationship between passion, resilience, and the ability to adapt pedagogically is critical in creating an environment that fosters student success. Passion drives teachers to invest in their students' success, while resilience enables them to persist through challenges. Together, these traits empower educators to adapt their teaching strategies in ways that optimize student learning. A teacher's passion fosters the drive to engage students, resilience allows them to overcome setbacks, and pedagogical adaptability ensures that their teaching remains effective in a diverse classroom. This combination results in a dynamic and supportive learning environment that nurtures both teacher and student growth.

For example, Dahlia's experience demonstrates how these core themes intersect. By staying passionate about her role as an educator, she remained motivated to adapt her teaching strategies to accommodate her students' needs. Simultaneously, her resilience helped her persist through the challenges that arose when implementing these strategies, ensuring that her students benefited from the adjustments she made (refer to Figure 1).

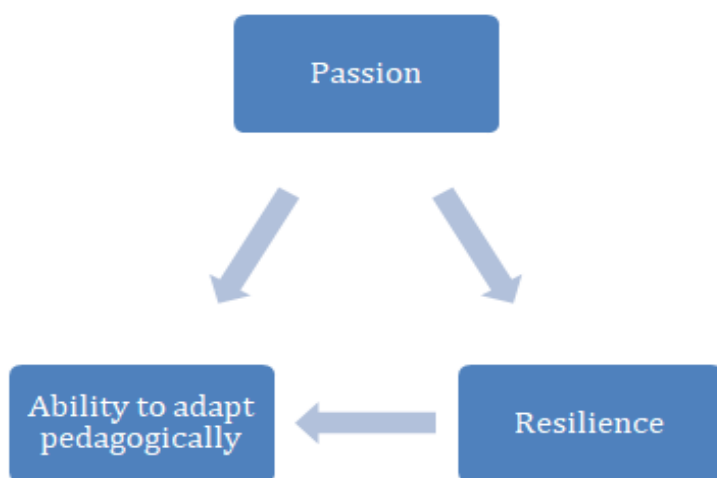


Figure 1 Core Themes of the Phenomenological Study

Thus, the core themes of passion, resilience, and the ability to adapt pedagogically are deeply interconnected and essential for fostering student success. Teachers who cultivate these qualities are better equipped to create positive and inclusive learning environments, leading to greater student engagement, satisfaction, and achievement.

Policy Implications for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Philippines

The study findings have significant policy implications for both Saudi Arabia and the Philippines. By prioritizing teacher well-being, investing in comprehensive professional development programs that address cultural nuances and equip teachers with the skills to navigate diverse learning needs, and empowering teachers with greater autonomy and decision-making authority, both nations can create a more supportive and fulfilling teaching profession. This, in turn, will foster a more engaging and effective learning environment for all students, ultimately enhancing the quality of education in both countries.

Furthermore, by fostering a culture of continuous learning and collaboration among educators, and by providing access to the necessary resources and technology, both countries can ensure that teachers are equipped to meet the evolving demands of the 21st-century classroom and effectively prepare students for success in a rapidly changing world.

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