

Pedagogical Characteristics of Filipino Teachers in Special Education Abroad

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Abstract — The Filipino educational approach, known for its inclusivity and nurturing environments, is distinguished by teachers who excel in creating enriching learning atmospheres. This study delves into the Pedagogical Characteristics of Filipino Teachers in Special Education Abroad, specifically in Arizona. Employing Descriptive Qualitative Research and Colaizzi's Method of Thematic Analysis, the study aims to uncover strategies that foster stimulating learning environments for students with special needs, tailored to the district's unique cultural and educational context. Through Purposive Sampling, insights were gathered from Filipino Teachers, Filipino Special Education Teachers, Foreign Teachers, and Administrators. Building on previous studies, the research offers a comprehensive understanding of educational dynamics. Findings highlight Filipino teachers' exceptional relational intelligence and their ability to tailor methods to meet individual student needs. Their cultural background enhances their ability to relate to diverse students, fostering resilience. Participants praised Filipino SPED teachers for their professionalism, noting their significant contributions to parent engagement and student success. These teachers exhibit patience, adaptability, and a deep commitment to student growth, enriching the educational landscape with diverse perspectives. Their presence fosters community and cultural exchange, enhancing the learning experience. In conclusion, the study underscores the invaluable contributions of Filipino teachers in Special Education abroad, emphasizing their profound impact on student learning outcomes and the broader educational community.

Keywords — *Filipino, Special Education, Pedagogy, Inclusivity, Nurturing Environment*

I. Introduction

The increasing international mobility of teachers has become a defining feature of contemporary education systems, especially in special education where shortages of qualified professionals persist across many countries. Among internationally mobile educators, Filipino teachers are one of the most visible groups contributing to global education, especially in inclusive and special education settings (Batalova, 2023; Rosales, 2024). Their growing presence reflects migration trends and recognition of their pedagogical competence, adaptability, and commitment to student-centered learning.

Special education teaching requires not only instructional expertise but also relational skills, cultural responsiveness, and the ability to foster inclusive learning environments. Research emphasizes that effective special educators demonstrate empathy, adaptability, and collaboration in meeting diverse learner needs (Somma & Bennett, 2020; Hernández-Saca et al., 2023). Filipino teachers, whose professional identity often centers on values of care, resilience, and relational

responsibility, may therefore bring unique strengths to multicultural educational contexts (Maravillas, 2020; Nomnian et al., 2023).

Migration also influences teachers' professional identities. Studies on internationally recruited educators show that teaching abroad requires adjustment to new institutional expectations, communication norms, and accountability systems (Lange, 2024; Brazas, 2023). These transitions can pose challenges such as adapting to compliance demands, inclusive classroom practices, and unfamiliar behavioral frameworks. However, migrant educators often develop new pedagogical strategies and intercultural skills through these experiences, boosting their professional growth and instructional flexibility (Arcillo, 2023; Rosales, 2024).

Within special education, culturally responsive teaching is seen as a key factor in supporting students with disabilities, especially in diverse and marginalized communities. Teachers who build strong relationships with students and families significantly improve engagement, belonging, and learning outcomes (Nishioka, 2019; Lewis, 2018). Filipino educators' emphasis on relational teaching, collaboration, and inclusive values may position them as important contributors to culturally responsive special education practices.

Despite their growing presence in international classrooms, research specifically examining the pedagogical traits of Filipino special education teachers working abroad remains limited. Existing studies mainly focus on migration experiences or general teaching practices, leaving a gap in understanding how Filipino teachers' cultural backgrounds, educational journeys, and professional identities shape their work in special education settings (Brazas, 2023; Lange, 2024). Addressing this gap is vital for guiding teacher support programs, enhancing inclusive practices, and recognizing the contributions of migrant educators worldwide.

This study aims to examine the pedagogical traits of Filipino special education teachers abroad, specifically how their cultural experiences, professional paths, and teaching practices influence their effectiveness in inclusive educational settings. By highlighting educators' and stakeholders' perspectives, this research seeks to deepen understanding of internationally mobile special educators and their role in strengthening inclusive education globally. In exploring the significant contributions of Filipino Special Education (SpED) teachers abroad, it is crucial to frame the understanding within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This study explores the unique role of Filipino SpED teachers through Maslow's lens, which suggests that individuals' needs must be fulfilled in a hierarchical order, from basic physiological needs to higher psychological needs.

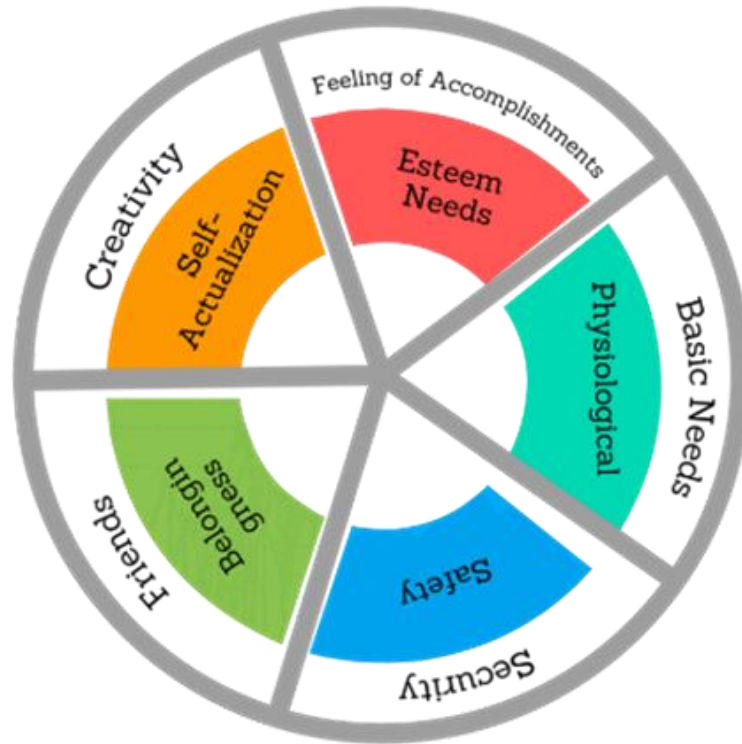


Figure 1. The Theory of Filipino Inherit Benevolence adopting the Framework presented by Maslow, anticipates that the current study will contribute to the research and development related to quality of life in the field of Special Education.

Within Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the elements of Love, Belongingness, and Self-Actualization emerge as key factors worth exploring when considering the pedagogical attributes of Filipino educators in international settings. Recognizing these factors' influence is essential, as they shape the approaches and practices of Filipino teachers abroad. This discussion examines how these components influence the pedagogical landscape and contribute to the holistic growth of educators and students in special education abroad.

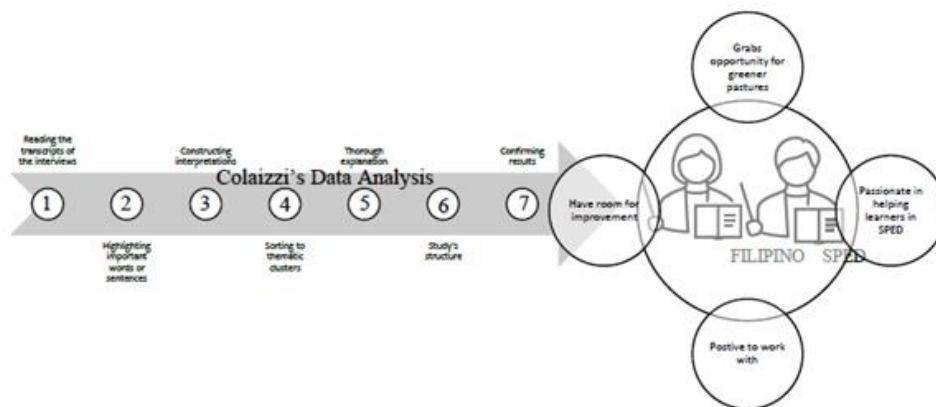


Figure 2. Paradigm of study in identifying the Pedagogical Characteristics of Special Education Filipino Teachers Abroad

In summary, the pedagogical traits of Filipino teachers in special education abroad should focus on creating a supportive and inclusive environment that meets students' needs for love and belonging, while fostering self-actualization through personalized, culturally sensitive teaching strategies. By exploring these aspects, the study adds to global discussions on teacher mobility, inclusive education, and culturally responsive pedagogy, highlighting the role of migrant educators in creating equitable learning environments.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following:

1. Who are the Filipino SPED teachers abroad, and how do their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and educational journeys shape their perspectives and approaches to special education teaching in international contexts?
2. What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Filipino teachers in special education abroad in terms of pedagogical practices?
3. What are the best practices employed by Filipino special education teachers abroad in effectively supporting the diverse learning needs of students?
4. How do Filipino teachers collaborate with colleagues and engage with professional development opportunities to enhance their pedagogical skills in special education abroad?
5. Based on the results of the study, what professional development plan may be proposed to strengthen the weaknesses of Filipino SPED teachers?

Literature Review

Filipino Teachers in International Education

Filipino teachers have become a significant presence in international education systems due to their professional preparation, adaptability, and strong commitment to student learning. Migration studies show that Filipino educators are often recruited to address shortages in specialized teaching areas, including special education, where their work ethic and instructional dedication are highly valued (Batalova, 2023; Rosales, 2024). Research further suggests that Filipino teachers' cultural emphasis on care, resilience, and community contributes positively to classroom relationships and student engagement (Maravillas, 2020).

Migration and Professional Adjustment

Teaching abroad requires educators to adapt to new institutional policies, compliance structures, and instructional frameworks. Studies indicate that Filipino special education teachers working overseas frequently encounter challenges related to documentation requirements, communication norms, and inclusive education models, yet these experiences often promote

professional growth and intercultural competence (Lange, 2024; Brazas, 2023). Arcillo (2023) emphasizes that internationally mobile teachers often develop enhanced collaboration skills and pedagogical flexibility as they adjust to foreign education systems.

Teacher–Student Relationships in Inclusive Education

Strong relational practices are central to effective special education instruction. Research shows that positive teacher–student relationships improve academic engagement, emotional development, and school belonging for students with disabilities (Nishioka, 2019). Inclusive education frameworks further highlight the importance of culturally responsive teaching and emotionally supportive classroom climates in promoting participation and learning among diverse student populations (Lewis, 2018).

Pedagogical Strategies for Diverse Learners

Effective special education teaching requires flexible instructional approaches tailored to individual learner needs. Evidence supports the use of differentiated instruction, multisensory teaching, structured support strategies, and assistive technologies to improve accessibility and learning outcomes for students with disabilities (Somma & Bennett, 2020; Silverman, 2023). Collaborative teaching practices and shared instructional planning also enhance inclusive environments by integrating multiple perspectives and expertise (Grell, 2023).

Collaboration and Professional Development

Professional collaboration and continuous learning are critical to sustaining effective special education practice. Teachers who participate in professional learning communities, peer collaboration, and reflective professional development demonstrate stronger instructional practices and higher professional satisfaction (Torgerson, 2022). Professional development also supports internationally recruited teachers in understanding compliance systems, inclusive practices, and culturally responsive instruction within their host educational contexts (Hubbard, 2023).

II. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the pedagogical characteristics of Filipino teachers working in special education abroad. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because the study sought to understand participants’ lived experiences, perceptions, and professional practices within international educational contexts. By focusing on narratives and personal meanings, the research aimed to generate an in-depth understanding of how cultural background, migration experiences, and professional training shape Filipino special education teachers’ pedagogical approaches overseas.

Participants in the study included Filipino special education teachers working abroad, as well as colleagues, administrators, and other professionals who had direct experience collaborating

with them. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that individuals included in the study had relevant knowledge and experience regarding Filipino SPED teachers in international settings. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, voluntary participation was emphasized, and anonymity was maintained by assigning letter codes (e.g., Participant A, Participant B) instead of using real names or institutional affiliations.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, written responses, and focused group discussions (FGDs). These methods allowed participants to describe their experiences, observations, and perspectives in their own words while still ensuring that responses addressed the research questions. Interviews were transcribed verbatim immediately after completion to preserve accuracy. Field notes were also reviewed multiple times to capture contextual details and nonverbal cues relevant to interpretation.

The collected data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method, which provides a systematic process for identifying themes from qualitative narratives. First, transcripts were read repeatedly to gain a general understanding of participants' experiences. Significant statements related to the pedagogical characteristics of Filipino SPED teachers abroad were then extracted and highlighted. Meanings were formulated from these statements and grouped into thematic clusters. These clusters were organized into broader themes describing shared experiences and perceptions across participants. A comprehensive description of the phenomenon was then developed, followed by the identification of its fundamental structure. Finally, member checking was conducted by returning the findings to selected participants to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of the interpretations.

Through this process, the study ensured credibility, consistency, and transparency in data interpretation. The methodological approach allowed the researcher to capture rich descriptions of participants' experiences and to identify meaningful patterns that explain the pedagogical strengths, challenges, and practices of Filipino special education teachers working abroad.

III. Results and Discussion

Research Question 1. Who are the Filipino SPED teachers abroad, and how do their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and educational journeys shape their perspectives and approaches to teaching?

The findings indicate that Filipino SPED teachers abroad are professionals whose teaching philosophies are shaped by migration experiences, cultural identity, and exposure to diverse educational contexts. Participants described their professional journeys as driven by opportunity, resilience, and dedication to special education.

Participant A reflected on the role of academic preparation and opportunity: *“As I progressed in the degree, all fell into places. I was eventually hired in a US school district. For me, advanced studies, exposure, and opportunities took me here.”*

Similarly, Participant B emphasized cultural resilience as a motivating force: *“As a Filipino we are known for being resilient. We thrive in order to succeed. This motivates me to work abroad.”*

These responses suggest that Filipino SPED teachers’ professional identities are shaped by both structural opportunities and cultural values. Migration experiences appear to cultivate adaptability, perseverance, and a commitment to growth.

This finding supports Lange (2024), who noted that Filipino educators abroad develop adaptive coping strategies to navigate new educational systems. Likewise, Brazas (2023) highlighted migration as a factor influencing teachers’ instructional approaches and professional perspectives. The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating how cultural resilience directly informs inclusive pedagogical practices.

Research Question 2. What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Filipino SPED teachers abroad in terms of pedagogical practices?

Strengths

Participants consistently identified instructional organization, individualized planning, and relational engagement as key strengths of Filipino SPED teachers.

Participant A described the structural competence of Filipino teachers: *“Classroom management, organization, structure, instructional expertise, and genuine approach to care and services.”*

Participant C emphasized their commitment to individualized planning: *“They really make an effort in IEP and goals.”*

Participant L highlighted relational teaching: *“One of the greatest strengths of Filipino SPED teachers is their capacity to establish dependable, one-on-one connections with children.”*

Table 1. Themes on Strengths of Filipino SPED Teachers

Meaning Unit	Category
Classroom management and structure	Instructional competence
IEP development and planning	Individualized support
Student relationships	Relational pedagogy
Safe and inclusive environment	Emotional support
Adaptability and flexibility	Cultural responsiveness

These findings demonstrate that Filipino SPED teachers integrate both procedural expertise and relational teaching approaches. Their ability to combine structured instruction with empathy suggests a holistic model of special education practice.

This interpretation aligns with Pierce (2022), who described individualized planning as foundational to effective special education. Likewise, Coristine et al. (2022) emphasized the role of teacher–student relationships in improving student engagement and outcomes. The present study reinforces these findings by illustrating how Filipino teachers naturally combine these dimensions in practice.

Weaknesses

Participants described perceived weaknesses primarily related to systemic adjustment rather than instructional deficiencies.

Participant A noted institutional expectations: *“Compliance and reporting requirements... the US has strict compliance and accountabilities in education.”*

Participant C observed behavioral challenges: *“Dealing with behavior issues.”*

Participant H described unfamiliarity with inclusion models: *“Inclusion is not as common in the Philippines... this is an area that is new for the teachers.”*

Table 2. Themes on Weaknesses of Filipino SPED Teachers

Meaning Unit	Category
Compliance and reporting	Institutional adjustment
Behavior management challenges	Classroom transition demands
Inclusion practices	System adaptation
Rapport dependency	Relational balance

These findings suggest that perceived weaknesses reflect contextual transitions rather than lack of pedagogical competence. Filipino teachers’ challenges appear linked to adapting to new administrative systems and inclusion expectations.

This interpretation supports Lynch (2023), who emphasized the complexity of compliance systems in education. Additionally, Sepúlveda et al. (2023) identified behavior management as a universal challenge among educators. The present findings contribute to this literature by situating these challenges within the context of international teacher transition.

Research Question 3. What best practices do Filipino SPED teachers employ in supporting diverse learners?

Participants described Filipino teachers as fostering inclusive, collaborative, and emotionally supportive classrooms.

Participant E explained: “They provide a rich learning environment where students feel safe and everyone is welcomed.”

Participant H emphasized compassion: “These teachers have compassion to work to empower the students.”

Participant J highlighted relational teaching: “My perceived strengths are getting to know students one-on-one to develop strong relationships.”

Table 3. Themes on Best Practices

Meaning Unit	Category
Inclusive classroom climate	Emotional safety
Compassionate teaching	Student empowerment
Collaboration with colleagues	Team-based instruction
Student-centered strategies	Individual responsiveness

These findings indicate that Filipino SPED teachers prioritize relational and inclusive pedagogical strategies. Their emphasis on safety, belonging, and empathy suggests a teaching approach grounded in holistic development rather than purely academic instruction.

This supports Lewis (2018), who emphasized that inclusive classrooms improve participation and belonging. Similarly, Hummel (2024) noted that collaborative learning enhances both academic and social outcomes. The present study reinforces these findings by demonstrating that Filipino teachers consistently implement such practices in international contexts.

Research Question 4. How do Filipino SPED teachers collaborate and engage in professional development?

Participants consistently reported strong engagement in collaborative learning communities and professional growth opportunities.

Participant K observed: “*Administration-sponsored weekly professional development sessions are attended by Filipino SPED teachers.*”

Participant G added: “They ask questions, show interest, and collaborate with all staff members.”

Table 4. Themes on Collaboration and Professional Growth

Meaning Unit	Category
Participation in training	Continuous learning
Professional dialogue	Collaborative culture
Peer support	Instructional improvement
Adaptation of strategies	Reflective practice

These findings suggest that Filipino SPED teachers view professional development as an ongoing responsibility. Their engagement reflects a commitment to lifelong learning and instructional refinement.

This aligns with Torgerson (2022), who found that collaborative professional learning improves instructional effectiveness. Likewise, Hubbard (2023) emphasized that strong professional relationships enhance teacher performance and confidence.

Research Question 5. What professional development plan may strengthen identified weaknesses?

Based on the findings, targeted professional development should focus on system adaptation rather than instructional remediation.

Table 5. Proposed Professional Development Plan

Area	Objective	Expected Outcome
Compliance training	Improve reporting accuracy	Increased institutional alignment
Behavior management workshops	Strengthen intervention skills	Improved classroom stability
Inclusion training	Enhance inclusive strategies	Greater instructional confidence
Wellness support	Address burnout risks	Sustained teacher effectiveness

These recommendations reflect participant-identified needs and emphasize institutional support structures. The findings suggest that targeted training can strengthen teachers’ transition into international systems while maintaining their instructional strengths.

This interpretation supports Lo (2024), who highlighted transition planning as essential for special education systems. Additionally, Xie et al. (2022) identified teacher wellness initiatives as critical in preventing burnout. The present study reinforces the need for structured support for internationally recruited educators.

IV. Conclusion

This study examined the pedagogical characteristics of Filipino teachers working in special education abroad and explored how their experiences, practices, and professional engagement influence instructional effectiveness in international contexts. The findings reveal that Filipino special education teachers abroad demonstrate strong relational pedagogy, cultural adaptability, and professional commitment that collectively support inclusive learning environments for students with diverse needs.

The results show that Filipino SPED teachers’ professional identities are shaped by their cultural upbringing, migration experiences, and educational preparation. Their narratives reflect resilience, motivation for professional growth, and a strong sense of responsibility toward students and families. These qualities influence their teaching approaches by emphasizing relationship-building, individualized instruction, and culturally responsive practices. In this sense, their lived

experiences function not merely as background factors but as pedagogical resources that enhance their ability to serve diverse learners.

In terms of instructional practices, Filipino SPED teachers were consistently perceived as organized, structured, and student-centered. Their strengths include effective classroom management, individualized education planning, use of multisensory and differentiated instruction, and strong rapport with students and families. These practices contribute to safe and supportive learning environments that foster both academic development and social–emotional growth. Their emphasis on compassion, patience, and relational engagement reflects a holistic teaching orientation that extends beyond technical instructional strategies.

While the study identified several strengths, some challenges were also noted. These include adjustment to compliance requirements, behavioral management expectations, and inclusive instructional models within international systems. However, these challenges were largely contextual and transitional rather than reflective of pedagogical inadequacy. The findings suggest that such difficulties are common when teachers navigate unfamiliar institutional expectations and cultural contexts. Importantly, participants indicated that Filipino SPED teachers demonstrate openness to feedback, willingness to learn, and commitment to professional growth, suggesting strong potential for continued development with appropriate institutional support.

The study further revealed that Filipino SPED teachers actively engage in collaboration and professional development. Their participation in workshops, professional learning communities, mentoring, and collaborative teaching practices reflects a strong commitment to continuous improvement. This engagement contributes to enhanced instructional practices and fosters supportive professional networks that benefit both teachers and students. Their collaborative orientation strengthens school communities and promotes shared responsibility for student success.

Overall, the findings highlight Filipino special education teachers abroad as resilient, reflective, and relational practitioners whose cultural strengths and professional dedication enrich international educational environments. Their contributions extend beyond instructional delivery to include cultural exchange, community building, and the promotion of inclusive educational values. These conclusions underscore the significance of supporting internationally recruited educators and recognizing their role as transformative contributors to global special education practice.

V. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen professional practice, institutional support, and future research related to Filipino special education teachers abroad.

First, educational institutions employing internationally recruited special education teachers should provide structured orientation and mentoring programs focused on compliance procedures, reporting systems, and administrative expectations. Such support would facilitate smoother professional transitions and reduce adjustment challenges related to institutional policies.

Second, targeted professional development opportunities should be offered in areas identified as contextual challenges, including behavioral intervention strategies, inclusive instructional practices, and transition planning for students with disabilities. Providing access to ongoing training in these areas would enhance teacher confidence and effectiveness while ensuring alignment with international special education standards.

Third, schools should promote collaborative professional cultures that encourage peer mentoring, professional learning communities, and shared instructional planning. Since Filipino SPED teachers demonstrate strong collaborative tendencies, institutional structures that support teamwork can further enhance instructional innovation and professional satisfaction.

Fourth, wellness and mental health initiatives should be integrated into professional development programs. Supporting teacher well-being can help mitigate potential burnout associated with migration, workload demands, and professional adjustment, thereby sustaining long-term effectiveness and retention.

Fifth, future research may explore longitudinal experiences of internationally recruited special education teachers, examine student outcomes associated with culturally responsive teaching practices, and compare the experiences of Filipino educators across different international contexts. Such studies would deepen understanding of how global teacher mobility influences special education systems and professional practice.

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