

A Narrative Exploration of Filipino Teachers' Pedagogical Practices in Supporting Students with Autism in The North Slope Borough School District

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Abstract — This study explored the pedagogical practices of Filipino teachers supporting students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the North Slope Borough School District through a qualitative narrative research design. The purpose of the study was to examine the lived experiences and significant stories of teachers working in special education settings and to identify pedagogical insights that could inform effective instructional practices. Ten Filipino teachers served as co-participants in this study. Data were collected through narrative interviews and reflective storytelling, allowing participants to share their experiences in teaching students with autism within the unique cultural and educational environment of the North Slope Borough School District. Narrative analysis was used to examine recurring themes and patterns from the participants' stories. Findings revealed that participants narrated their experiences through stories of adaptation, empathy, instructional persistence, and collaborative engagement while teaching students with autism. From these narratives, four core themes emerged: Navigating Novel Environment, Observing Empathy, Resilient Instruction, and Mentoring Community. These themes highlight the teachers' ability to adapt to new educational contexts, demonstrate compassion toward students' emotional and behavioral needs, maintain flexible and persistent instructional strategies, and engage in collaborative mentoring relationships with colleagues and support staff. The narratives also generated creative insights into the importance of culturally

responsive teaching, reflective practice, and collaborative professional support in special education settings. Based on these findings, the study proposes the NORM Framework—Navigating Novel Environment, Observing Empathy, Resilient Instruction, and Mentoring Community—as a conceptual model that represents Filipino teachers’ pedagogical practices in supporting students with autism. The framework illustrates how teachers integrate adaptation, empathy, instructional resilience, and collaboration to create inclusive and supportive learning environments.

The study concluded that Filipino teachers’ experiences in the North Slope Borough School District demonstrate effective pedagogical approaches that support the academic, social, and behavioral development of students with autism. The proposed NORM Framework may serve as a guide for educators, administrators, and future researchers in strengthening inclusive education practices and professional development programs for teachers working with students with autism

Keywords: ASD, culture, Filipino special teachers, framework, inclusive education, narrative, norms

I. INTRODUCTION

The education of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) continues to evolve as schools seek culturally responsive, evidence-based, and contextually grounded practices that promote meaningful inclusion and academic success. While much of the existing literature on autism intervention focuses on standardized frameworks and empirically validated strategies, less attention has been given to the lived pedagogical experiences of teachers working in geographically isolated and culturally unique districts. In particular, limited research explores how Filipino teachers—who comprise a significant portion of the educator workforce in Alaska—navigate instructional practices while supporting students with autism in rural and Indigenous communities such as the North Slope Borough School District (NSBSD). The North Slope Borough School District presents a distinctive educational context. Located in Arctic Alaska and serving predominantly Iñupiaq students, NSBSD operates within a cultural landscape shaped by Indigenous values, community interconnectedness, and environmental realities. Within this setting, Filipino teachers often serve as cultural bridges bringing their own educational

philosophies, collectivist values, and relational approaches to teaching while adapting to the cultural norms of the Iñupiaq community and the individualized needs of students with autism. Their pedagogical practices are shaped not only by formal training in special education and applied behavior analysis, but also by cross-cultural negotiation, resilience, mentorship, and community engagement.

Differences in social communication and the existence of restricted or repetitive behaviors are hallmarks of autism spectrum disorder, although how these traits appear vary depending on the cultural and environmental setting. It takes adaptability, culturally sensitive teaching, trauma-informed understanding, and cooperation with families and multidisciplinary teams to support autistic students in remote districts like NSBSD. Research, however, seldom documents how educators in isolated Arctic schools evaluate behaviors, modify interventions, and maintain inclusive learning environments in the face of these challenges.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to identify and analyze the best practices employed by Filipino SPED teachers in the North Slope Borough School District. Specifically, it sought to address the following questions:

1. How do the participants narrate the significant stories in teaching special education program?
2. What core narratives derived from the significant stories of the co- participants?
3. What creative insights created based on the significant stories of the co- participants?
4. What can be proposed based on the significant stories of the co- participants?

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative narrative research design to explore and understand the pedagogical practices of Filipino teachers in supporting students with autism in the North Slope Borough School District. A qualitative narrative approach was considered appropriate because it focused on collecting and interpreting the lived experiences and personal stories of participants. Narrative research allowed the researcher to examine how teachers constructed meaning from their experiences, instructional practices, and interactions with students with autism within their unique educational and cultural contexts. The study gathered detailed narratives from Filipino teachers who had experience teaching students with autism in the North Slope Borough School District. Through these narratives, the researcher explored how teachers described their instructional strategies, classroom practices, challenges, and adaptations used to support the learning and behavioral needs of students with autism. The narrative design also enabled the researcher to capture the influence of teachers' cultural backgrounds, professional training, and experiences in shaping their pedagogical approaches.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their experiences openly and reflectively. These interviews provided rich descriptions of classroom practices, support strategies, and personal insights regarding teaching students with autism in a diverse educational setting. The narratives collected from participants were carefully documented and analyzed to identify common themes, patterns, and meanings embedded in their experiences. The analysis of the narratives focused on interpreting the stories shared by the participants, highlighting key pedagogical practices, challenges, and culturally informed approaches used by Filipino teachers. Through thematic narrative analysis, the researcher organized the participants' experiences into meaningful categories that illustrated how these educators supported students with autism in the district

Data Generation and Selection of Co-Participants

The study generated data through narrative inquiry by gathering the lived experiences and professional stories of Filipino teachers who supported students with autism in the North Slope Borough School District. The purpose of the data generation process was to obtain rich, detailed narratives that described the pedagogical practices, strategies, and experiences of teachers working with students with autism in their classrooms.

The selection of co-participants was conducted through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was used to identify individuals who had direct and meaningful experience teaching and supporting students with autism within the district. The co-participants consisted of Filipino teachers who were currently employed in the North Slope Borough School District and had experience working with students diagnosed with autism in either inclusive or specialized educational settings. Specific inclusion criteria were established to ensure that the selected co-participants could provide relevant and insightful narratives. Teachers were selected if they (1) identified as Filipino educators, (2) had teaching experience in the North Slope Borough School District, and (3) had direct experience supporting students with autism in their classrooms. These criteria ensured that the narratives collected reflected authentic professional experiences related to the focus of the study. Potential co-participants were contacted and informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Those who agreed to participate provided informed consent before the data collection process began. A small number of participants, ten teachers, were selected to allow for in-depth exploration of their personal and professional narratives, which is consistent with qualitative narrative research. Data were generated primarily through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed co-participants to share their experiences, reflections, and teaching practices in their own words. The interviews encouraged participants to narrate their stories about supporting students with autism, including instructional approaches, challenges encountered, and strategies they developed to support student learning and inclusion. The narratives shared by the co-participants served as the primary source of data for the study. These stories were carefully documented and later analyzed to understand the pedagogical practices of Filipino teachers and how their experiences shaped the ways they supported students with autism in the North Slope Borough School District.

Thematic Analysis

This study operates on several foundational assumptions grounded in narrative inquiry and the NORM framework. First, it assumes that Filipino teachers lived experiences are valid and valuable sources of knowledge. Their personal and professional narratives are not viewed as subjective anecdotes, but as meaningful constructions of reality that illuminate how pedagogical practices are shaped by migration, culture, identity, and context. The study assumes that participants can reflect on and articulate their experiences in ways that authentically represent their work in supporting students with autism in the North Slope Borough School District.

Second, the study assumes that pedagogical practices are socially and culturally constructed rather than neutral or purely technical. It assumes that Filipino teachers draw upon cultural values, relational orientations, prior training, and adaptive experiences when teaching students with autism. These practices are believed to be influenced by both Filipino cultural frameworks and the unique environmental, geographic, and Indigenous community context of the North Slope. teaching is assumed to be relational, contextual, and dynamic.

Third, this study assumes that supporting students with autism extends beyond instructional strategies to include empathy, resilience, and community engagement. In alignment with the NORM framework, it assumes that teachers actively navigate novel environments, demonstrate culturally grounded empathy, implement resilient instruction, and engage in mentoring relationships within the school community. It further assumes that autism should be approached through a humanizing and strengths-based lens, recognizing students as capable individuals rather than defining them by deficits.

Finally, the study assumes that the North Slope Borough School District context characterized by geographic isolation, cultural richness, and unique systemic challenges meaningfully shapes teachers' experiences and pedagogical decisions. These contextual realities are assumed to influence how Filipino teachers adapt, sustain, and refine their instructional practices in support of students with autism

Literature Comparison

The findings of the study titled *A Narrative Exploration of Filipino Teachers' Pedagogical Practices in Supporting Students with Autism in the North Slope Borough School District* were compared with recent studies that examined teachers' instructional practices, inclusive strategies, and experiences in supporting students with autism.

The findings of the present study were consistent with the research of Amy M. Sam (2020), who emphasized the importance of implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) when teaching students with autism in school settings. Sam (2020) found that schools implementing structured autism programs and evidence-based instructional strategies demonstrated improvements in program quality and student outcomes. Teachers in the present study similarly described using structured routines, individualized instruction, and supportive classroom strategies when teaching students with autism.

The findings were also comparable with the study of Anne C. Stahmer (2023), which highlighted the importance of integrating evidence-based classroom interventions to effectively support students with autism in educational environments. Stahmer explained that the successful implementation of autism interventions often depended on teachers' training, instructional knowledge, and the availability of school resources. This aligned with the experiences of Filipino teachers in the present study who described adapting their teaching strategies and utilizing classroom supports to meet the diverse needs of students with autism.

Similarly, the findings supported the research of Michael A. Alassaf (2025), which examined teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward inclusive education for children with autism. Alassaf found that teachers generally demonstrated positive attitudes toward inclusion but also reported gaps in specialized knowledge and professional training related to autism education. These findings were consistent with the narratives in the present study, where teachers expressed commitment to supporting students with autism while also acknowledging the need for continuous professional development and support.

The results of the study were also comparable with the research of Lena Petersson-Bloom (2025), who emphasized the role of teacher self-efficacy and professional confidence in promoting inclusive education for students with autism. Petersson-Bloom reported that teachers with stronger professional preparation and support systems were more likely to demonstrate positive attitudes and effective inclusive practices. The narratives in the present study similarly reflected that teachers' experiences, professional competence, and confidence influenced how they implemented pedagogical practices for students with autism.

In addition, the findings were comparable with the study conducted by Amanda L. Miller and colleagues (2024), which explored teachers' insights on cultivating inclusive education for students with complex support needs. Their study highlighted that teachers often relied on adaptive instructional strategies, collaboration, and reflective practices to promote inclusive learning environments. Similarly, the Filipino teachers in the present study described adapting instructional approaches and building supportive classroom environments to ensure meaningful participation of students with autism.

Furthermore, research focusing on Filipino educators by A. B. Sodsod (2025) emphasized the role of creative teaching strategies and learner engagement in supporting students with special needs. Sodsod found that innovative instructional practices and culturally responsive teaching approaches contributed to improved learning engagement among students with disabilities. These findings supported the present study, where Filipino teachers described flexible, culturally responsive, and student-centered pedagogical practices when supporting learners with autism.

Overall, the findings of the present study were consistent with recent literature emphasizing the importance of evidence-based practices, teacher preparedness, inclusive pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching in supporting students with autism. However, the current study extended the literature by highlighting the narrative experiences of Filipino teachers working in the North Slope Borough School District, thereby providing a deeper understanding of how cultural background, teaching experiences, and contextual factors influenced their pedagogical practices in supporting students with autism.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical principles were carefully observed throughout the conduct of the study titled *A Narrative Exploration of Filipino Teachers' Pedagogical Practices in Supporting Students with Autism in the North Slope Borough School District*. The researcher ensured that the rights, dignity, and well-being of all co-participants were protected during the research process. Prior to the data collection, the researcher sought the necessary permissions from appropriate authorities within the North Slope Borough School District. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, and the selected co-participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, and significance of the research. Each participant was provided with an informed consent form, which explained their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the identities of the participants were protected by using pseudonyms instead of their real names in the interview transcripts and in the presentation of the research findings. Any identifying information related to the participants or their schools was removed to prevent recognition. All collected data, including interview recordings and transcripts, were securely stored and were accessible only to the researcher.

The researcher also ensured that the participants were treated with respect and sensitivity, especially when sharing their professional experiences and personal reflections related to teaching students with autism. Participants were given the opportunity to express their thoughts freely without pressure or judgment. Furthermore, the researcher maintained integrity and transparency throughout the research process by accurately representing the narratives shared by the participants. The findings of the study were presented honestly, ensuring that the voices and experiences of Filipino teachers were faithfully reflected in the interpretation of the data.

III. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

The narrative analysis of the experiences of Filipino teachers working with students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the North Slope Borough School District revealed pedagogical practices that are reflected in the NORM Framework: Navigating Novel Environment, Observing Empathy, Resilient Instruction, and Mentoring Community. The significant stories shared by the ten co-participants demonstrated how teachers adapted to unique educational, cultural, and environmental contexts while supporting students with autism.

1. One of the participants remarked about how they learned to apply customized solutions for students with autism while adjusting to the new school setting. One described how he supported students with a range of needs while adapting to various behavioral treatments and classroom procedures.
2. One also talked about his early struggles with classroom management and how structured instruction increased student involvement. One participant talked about how they were able to comprehend the behaviors of their students and respond with helpful interventions. One described how she was able to build trust with autistic pupils by being persistent and patient. One shared her experience of learning how to serve kids with varying learning capacities while teaching in a culturally sensitive manner. Additionally, one discussed how to adapt teaching methods to students' intellectual and social demands. A few of the participants thought on how crucial teamwork is to enhancing teaching methods. Two participants talked about how using individualized education plans (IEPs) influenced their teaching methods. They also shared how their professional experience and introspection improved their ability to manage autistic children.
3. From the participants' stories, four central narratives emerged, which formed the foundation of the NORM Framework. From the participants' stories, four central narratives Navigating Novel Environments, Observing Empathy, Resilient Instruction, and Mentoring Community

(NORM Framework)—emerged as the foundation of Filipino teachers’ pedagogical practices in supporting students with autism in the North Slope Borough School District. The experiences of each participant illustrate how these narratives shaped their teaching approaches. The theme Navigating Novel Environments discusses how teachers needs to adjust to a new cultural and educational context while teaching students with autism in a remote Alaskan community. It emphasized learning school routines, collaborating with support staff, and adapting instructional strategies to meet diverse student needs. Furthermore adapting to cultural differences and integrating culturally responsive teaching practice is important in the educational context of the North Slope Borough. The theme Resilient Instruction, examined the persistence in modifying teaching strategies when students with autism. Though it showed challenging behaviors or learning difficulties, this theme focused on structured routines, visual supports, and individualized interventions to promote engagement and learning. This theme also highlights how commitment to continuously adjusting lessons and strategies to ensure student participation. In addition, using differentiated instruction and consistent reinforcement, helps students with autism succeed academically and socially. The theme Observing Empathy emphasized understanding students’ emotional and behavioral needs. This theme described how important building trusting relationships with students and recognizing the importance of patience and compassion in supporting learners with autism. Moreover, approaches must focus on creating a calm and supportive classroom environment that respected each student’s individual differences Theme Mentoring Community examined how collaborating with colleagues, paraprofessionals, and families is essential in addressing the educational needs of a child with autism. This showed how teamwork and shared responsibility helped create a supportive learning environment for students with autism.

4. The narratives generated several insights about effective teaching practices in special education settings. First, Filipino teachers demonstrated strong adaptability when working in unfamiliar educational environments. Their willingness to learn new systems and strategies enabled them to respond effectively to students’ needs. Second, empathy was identified as a powerful pedagogical tool in special education. Teachers who prioritized understanding students’ perspectives were able to create supportive and inclusive learning environments. Third, resilience in instruction allowed teachers to maintain consistent and effective teaching

practices despite challenges such as behavioral difficulties, communication barriers, and environmental adjustments. Finally, collaboration among educators fostered a strong mentoring culture that enhanced teaching practices and professional development. These insights highlight the importance of culturally responsive teaching, emotional understanding, adaptive instruction, and collaborative support systems in special education.

5. Based on the narratives of the participants, the study proposes the NORM Framework as a conceptual model for understanding Filipino teachers' pedagogical practices in supporting students with autism. The NORM Framework consists of four interconnected components: Navigating Novel Environment teachers adapt to new educational contexts, cultural environments, and instructional demands while learning effective strategies for supporting students with autism. Observing Empathy, teachers demonstrate compassion and understanding toward students' emotional and behavioral needs, fostering trust and positive relationships. Resilient Instruction discusses how teachers apply flexible and evidence-based teaching strategies that address diverse learning needs and promote student success. Lastly, Mentoring Community emphasizes the importance of engagement in collaborative learning, mentorship, and professional support networks that strengthen instructional practices and improve outcomes for students with autism.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the narrative exploration of Filipino teachers' pedagogical practices in supporting students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the North Slope Borough School District, several conclusions were drawn from the significant stories shared by the ten co-participants: Aira, Anton, Carlo, Dennis, Faith, Hannah, Joy, Lily, Noel, and Ramon. These conclusions highlight how teachers navigate complex educational environments while demonstrating empathy, instructional resilience, and collaborative engagement. The findings collectively support the proposed NORM Framework, which explains the pedagogical practices of Filipino teachers in special education settings.

1. The participants narrated significant stories that reflected their experiences of teaching students with autism in a culturally and geographically unique educational environment. Their narratives revealed that teaching in the North Slope Borough School District required continuous adaptation, patience, and reflective practice. Teachers emphasized the importance of learning new instructional approaches and behavioral strategies when working with students with autism. Teachers must have a strong classroom management practice while developing structured teaching methods that supported student engagement. Building trusting relationships with students through patience and compassionate teaching practices. Overall, the participants' narratives demonstrated that teaching students with autism involves both professional dedication and emotional commitment, particularly when working in a unique educational setting.
2. From the participants' narratives, four core themes emerged that represent the pedagogical practices of Filipino teachers in special education. These themes form the NORM Framework. First, Navigating Novel Environment highlighted how teachers adapted to unfamiliar educational contexts, cultural diversity, and the specific needs of students with autism. The participants demonstrated flexibility and openness to learning new teaching practices. Second, Observing Empathy emphasized the importance of understanding students' emotional and behavioral needs. The teachers' empathetic approach helped them establish supportive relationships with students, which contributed to positive learning environments. Third,

Resilient Instruction reflected the teachers' ability to remain persistent and flexible in their teaching practices. Despite challenges such as behavioral difficulties and communication barriers, participants continuously modified their instructional strategies to meet students' individual needs. Fourth, Mentoring Community highlighted the importance of collaboration and professional support. Participants recognized that working closely with colleagues, support staff, and school administrators strengthened their teaching practices and improved outcomes for students with autism. These core narratives demonstrate that effective special education teaching involves a combination of adaptability, empathy, resilience, and collaboration.

3. The narratives of the participants generated several creative insights about teaching students with autism in diverse educational environments. One key insight is that Filipino teachers bring strong cultural values such as patience, compassion, and dedication into their teaching practices. These values help them respond effectively to the behavioral, social, and academic needs of students with autism. Another insight is that teaching effectiveness is strengthened when teachers combine evidence-based instructional strategies with empathetic understanding of students' experiences. Participants demonstrated that individualized instruction, structured routines, and supportive classroom environments are essential for promoting student learning. Furthermore, the study revealed that professional collaboration and peer mentorship play a significant role in improving teachers' instructional practices. Teachers who engage in collaborative learning and mentoring relationships are better equipped to address the complex challenges of special education teaching. These insights highlight the importance of integrating professional knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and collaborative practices in supporting students with autism.
4. Based on the collective narratives of the participants, the study proposes the NORM Framework as a conceptual guide for understanding Filipino teachers' pedagogical practices in supporting students with autism in the North Slope Borough School District. The NORM Framework consists of four interconnected components: Navigating Novel Environment, which emphasizes teachers' ability to adapt to unfamiliar educational settings and diverse learning contexts. Observing Empathy, which highlights the importance of understanding and responding to the emotional and behavioral needs of students with autism. Resilient Instruction,

which reflects teachers' persistence in implementing flexible and effective instructional strategies that support student learning. Mentoring Community, which underscores the significance of collaboration, peer support, and professional mentorship in strengthening teaching practices.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions derived from the significant stories of the co-participants—Aira, Anton, Carlo, Dennis, Faith, Hannah, Joy, Lily, Noel, and Ramon—several recommendations are proposed to enhance pedagogical practices in special education programs supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the North Slope Borough School District and similar educational contexts. The following recommendations were made.

1. The proposed NORM Framework may serve as a conceptual guide for improving teaching practices in special education programs. Educational institutions may consider integrating this framework into teacher training, instructional planning, and professional development initiatives.
2. Educational institutions provide structured orientation and professional development programs for teachers who are newly assigned to special education settings. Programs may include training on autism awareness, behavior support strategies, and culturally responsive teaching practices to help educators effectively navigate diverse classroom environments. In addition, they may provide continuous professional support that may strengthen teachers' confidence and competence in addressing the needs of students with autism.
3. School administrators may encourage teachers to share their experiences through reflective discussions, workshops, or professional learning communities so that meaningful stories and best practices can contribute to collective professional growth.

4. Educational institutions may strengthen Mentoring Communities by establishing collaborative learning environments where teachers can exchange strategies, share experiences, and support one another in addressing classroom challenges.
5. Teachers may consider professional development programs focus on strengthening teachers' emotional resilience and reflective teaching practices. Encouraging reflective practice allows educators to continuously improve their instructional approaches and better understand the needs of students with autism. Additionally, educational leaders may promote interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers, special education specialists, and support staff to ensure that students receive comprehensive and consistent support.

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