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Defining an effective EFL teacher: Insights from Filipino English educators

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Abstract

The demand for native and native-like English teachers in Asia has shifted preferences toward educators from countries like the Philippines, known for its high level of English fluency and nativized language forms. This study examines the unique challenges and attributes of Filipino English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Indonesia, focusing on their relatability to students and the high expectations placed on them as expatriates. The study utilizes a qualitative case study approach, gathering insights from six Filipino EFL teachers working in Batam, Indonesia, across five schools. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 11 questions, complemented by classroom observations and document analysis. The teachers, with varying levels of experience, shared their classroom challenges and strategies for effective teaching. Findings highlight the importance of adaptability, cultural awareness, and pedagogical flexibility in effective EFL teaching. Teachers emphasized the need for instructional strategies tailored to students' diverse learning needs, integrating structured curricula with supplementary materials. Their reflections also underscored the value of self-awareness and continuous professional development in improving teaching efficacy. This study provides insights into the complexities of being an expatriate EFL teacher in Indonesia. The findings suggest that EFL teacher training should prioritize cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and flexible pedagogical approaches. Future research could expand on these findings, exploring the experiences of Filipino teachers in different regions of Indonesia, to further understand the dynamics of expatriate teaching in Asia.

Keywords: EFL; Filipino English Teachers; Intercultural Dynamics; Pedagogical Adaptability; Professional Development.

INTRODUCTION

The demand for native English speakers (NES) to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Asian countries has been steadily increasing, with a notable preference for teachers from inner-circle countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Howard, 2019; Kirkpatrick, 2020). These preferences are seen as a symbol of prestige in educational settings, as schools in countries like Indonesia often promote the recruitment of NES to highlight

their educational quality (Floris & Renandya, 2020; Kiczkowski & Wu, 2018). However, this trend has created opportunities for teachers from outer-circle countries, where English is widely used as a second language, such as the Philippines, to fill the growing demand for EFL educators (Kachru, 1986). These teachers, who often possess a unique blend of native-like proficiency and strong cultural insights, are gaining recognition in the region (Mermelstein, 2015).

The Philippines, known for its high English proficiency, has long embraced English as a crucial part of its national identity (Cruz, 2022; Turmudi & Hajan, 2020). Historically, English became the dominant language in the Philippines by 1948, and since then, it has shaped the country's socio-cultural dynamics (Borlongan, 2022). As a result, Filipino EFL teachers are recognized for their high language proficiency, with the average Filipino's TOEFL score ranking second highest in Asia (Ozaki, 2021). In light of these factors, Filipino teachers are migrating to various Asian countries such as South Korea and Japan, where their skills are in high demand (Lee, 2022). This trend highlights the significant role of Filipino educators in the global EFL landscape, as they are not only sought after for their linguistic expertise but also for their ability to bridge cultural and educational gaps in diverse international settings.

In Indonesia, Filipino EFL teachers are particularly popular in private international schools, where the demand for qualified teachers is growing in tandem with the rising middle class and the increasing number of international institutions (Satienchayakorn & Grant, 2022). Filipino teachers possess qualities that appeal to Indonesian students, including relatability and cultural compatibility, compared to native speakers from inner-circle countries (Ozaki, 2017). The high level of proficiency in English among Filipino teachers, along with their familiarity with the needs of EFL learners, has made them attractive candidates for teaching positions in Indonesia (Turmudi & Hajan, 2020). However, the demands placed on Filipino teachers in Indonesia can be overwhelming, as they face not only professional challenges such as workload and emotional fatigue (Karousiou et al., 2018) but also cultural and language barriers (Haryadi, 2023; Ulla, 2021). Despite these challenges, the unique skills and perspectives that Filipino teachers bring to the classroom remain invaluable, making them indispensable to Indonesia's growing educational landscape. Their ability to adapt and relate to students is a key factor in their success, but continued support and understanding of their challenges are essential for ensuring their long-term effectiveness and well-being in the profession.

Despite the Philippines EFL teachers' advantages compared to other expatriate EFL teachers in Indonesia, being an English as foreign language teacher is not an easy task. Some personal and professional barriers might be encountered along the way (Ulla, 2021). These barriers including the lack of teachers' professional development programmes, cultural differences, language barriers, professional relationships (Haryadi, 2023; Ulla, 2021), and personal matters such as emotional experiences in form of fatigue, stress from workload, insufficient resources, and inadequate support (Karousiou et al., 2018). Additionally, since the Philippines EFL status is expatriate teachers in Indonesia, employers must set higher expectations than the local Indonesian

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EFL teachers that create greater responsibility for them. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) places considerable responsibility on educators, requiring them to maintain high teaching standards despite various challenges. In the twenty-first century, effective English instruction is non-negotiable (Hasanah & Utami, 2019). Therefore, despite the personal and professional struggles that Filipino EFL teachers may face, ensuring the quality and effectiveness of their teaching remains a top priority.

A substantial body of research has explored the attributes of effective EFL teachers. Borg (2006) highlights that foreign language teachers possess distinctive characteristics that shape their pedagogical approaches. Similarly, Farrell (2015) emphasizes the importance of critical competencies in effective teaching, arguing that teacher effectiveness is not solely dependent on linguistic proficiency but also on pedagogical skills and classroom management. These perspectives align with Korthagen (2004), who advocates for a holistic approach to teacher education that incorporates personal reflection and professional growth. Research on Filipino EFL teachers specifically provides further insights into the challenges and strategies employed in international teaching contexts.

Balintag and Saengsri (2022) examine demotivating factors among Filipino EFL teachers in Thailand, identifying coping strategies that enhance resilience and teaching efficacy. Ozaki (2017, 2021) investigates learners' perceptions of Filipino EFL teachers, revealing that while students appreciate their approachability and teaching style, perceptions of teacher expertise can still be influenced by native-speaker biases. These findings echo the broader discussions by Kiczkowski and Wu (2018) on discriminatory practices against non-native English-speaking teachers. However, while these studies provide valuable insights, there remains a gap in understanding how Filipino EFL teachers navigate the challenges posed by both local and international teaching contexts. This study aims to explore the distinctive attributes of Filipino EFL teachers and identify the strategies they employ to enhance their effectiveness in diverse educational settings.

Recent studies have examined innovative teaching strategies and translanguaging practices in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Marsevani and S (2023) explore the use of translanguaging in EFL classrooms, illustrating how Filipino teachers leverage multilingual resources to enhance learning outcomes. Marsevani et al. (2024) further investigate the language learning strategies of young learners from the perspective of EFL teachers, emphasizing the need for adaptive teaching methods that cater to diverse student needs. Overall, the literature underscores that effective EFL teaching involves a combination of pedagogical competence, cultural adaptability, and resilience in overcoming challenges. Filipino EFL teachers, in particular, navigate these complexities by drawing on their linguistic expertise, cross-cultural awareness, and innovative teaching strategies to ensure high-quality language instruction.

Defining effective teaching encompasses a broad spectrum of literacy, and interpretations of what makes a “good” teacher can vary. However, Korthagen (2004) asserts that the meaning of effective teaching is context-

dependent and thus subject to change. In a similar vein, Koç (2013), referencing Kounin (1970), defines "good teachers" as those who effectively manage inappropriate student behavior, navigate competing or developing events smoothly, maintain appropriate pacing, and sustain group focus. A good teacher is often considered a prerequisite for becoming an effective teacher (Kalay, 2017). Therefore, in order to be an effective teacher, one must first be a good teacher.

Every teaching and learning context is unique, and different subject areas may require different qualities from effective teachers. Borg (2006) identifies specific qualities that foreign language teachers must possess, which go beyond those required in other subject areas. These include credibility, flexibility, enthusiasm, subject-specific pedagogy, error correction, teaching content, teaching methodology, teacher-student relationships, and whether they are native or non-native speakers of the target language. Given that English is a foreign language in Indonesia, Filipino EFL teachers, as expatriates, bring unique cultural experiences and face distinct challenges in the classroom. These experiences not only promote intercultural understanding but also contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on teaching English as a foreign language abroad (Pondalos et al., 2022).

Despite existing research, there is a lack of studies focusing specifically on the cultural experiences and challenges of Filipino EFL teachers in Batam, Indonesia. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the qualities of effective EFL teachers from the perspective of Filipino educators in Batam. By doing so, the study seeks to provide insights into how Filipino teachers navigate their roles in a foreign teaching context and the specific qualities they deem essential for effective EFL instruction.

METHOD

Respondents

The researcher used a qualitative case study in this investigation. Creswell (1999) asserted that qualitative research should study an issue or phenomena in both a surface and a deep investigation. With the gathering of information that is frequently descriptive, thorough, and open-ended, it aims to reveal underlying motives, assumptions, and attitudes.

The research was conducted in five schools located in Batam. One of the researcher is an alumnus from one of these schools, which facilitated direct access to teachers. Most international schools in Batam, including the two selected by the researcher, have a majority of Filipino expatriates as teachers. The first informant, Mr. R1, is the secondary school principal and an IB DP Business Management teacher at School G. Previously, he taught history, but now, in addition to his role as principal, he also teaches management for high school students. He has been teaching since 2013, accumulating ten years of experience.

The second informant, Ms. LJ, teaches English at the secondary level in School K and has been teaching for five years. While both School G and School K employ expatriate teachers, School G has a higher number of them. The third

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informant, Mr. R2, is a Cambridge Biology teacher and the Director of Student Activities and Services at School K. He has been teaching for nearly six years. Additionally, three more educators provided insights regarding their teaching experience. Ms. A has been teaching her subject for almost one year, Mr. S has been teaching for nearly six years, and Ms. D has been teaching since 2018.

Instruments

Document analysis, observation, and interviews were used by researchers to collect data for this research. Interviews in general are a method of collecting information from material that is carried out through oral questions that are carried out alone, face to face, and in accordance with the objectives that have been set. To capture responses to these questions in more detail, interviews can also be supplemented with instruments such as audio recorders.

Procedures

The first step in gathering data was documentation. The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics of competent and successful Filipino EFL teachers in Batam, Indonesia. After conducting a thorough documentation process, researchers performed three classroom observations of the participants. Field-notes were used during these observations to capture detailed records of classroom activities. In addition to the observations, data were collected through interviews, where participants were asked questions in English and their responses were recorded. Finally, the researchers analyzed the collected data, identifying key variables to draw conclusions for the investigation. This process ensured that the final conclusions were supported by solid, evidence-based findings.

Data analysis

The interview, field notes, and document analysis all contributed to the triangulation of data that was used in this study. By processing the results of the interview transcript and observation, data analysis was performed. The researcher next concentrated on study questions that are concerning Characteristics of a Good and Effective Philippine EFL teachers in order to condense the data. Then, researchers displayed the data to analyze what is happening and utilize by transcribing the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews with six Filipino EFL teachers—Ms. LJ, Mr. R1, Mr. R2, Ms. A, Mr. S, and Ms. D—highlight key themes that contribute to effective teaching in Indonesia. Cultural adaptation emerged as a critical factor. While Ms. LJ and Mr. R2 experienced minimal difficulties due to cultural similarities, Mr. R1 and Ms. D initially faced culture shock but adapted by engaging with local customs.

Table 1. Interview Result

Theme	Ms. LJ (School K)	Mr. R1 (School G)	Mr. R2 (School K)	Ms. A (School G)	Mr. S (School P)	Ms. D (School P)
Years of Teaching	5+ years	10 years	6 years	1 year	6 years	Since 2018

Culture Shock	Adjusted instead of experiencing shock	Initially struggled, adapted through cultural learning	No major issues, similar culture	Amazed by students' attitudes	No culture shock, students excited to learn	Experienced initial culture shock but adapted to friendly environment
Teaching Materials	Cambridge curriculum, adapted based on students' needs	Online resources, textbooks, other teacher materials	Digital materials, international program resources	School-provided books, supplements with YouTube/podcasts	School-provided, adapts from other sources	Books, internet, student-based adaptations
Adapting Materials	No one-size-fits-all strategy, constant modifications	Adjusts materials based on student needs, differentiated activities	Follows curriculum but adapts details to student levels	Matches materials with learning objectives, uses multimedia	Uses online resources and interactive materials	Uses learning objectives to guide material selection, integrates games and interactive tools
Serving as a Model	Yes, teachers should be role models	Uses personal experience to guide students	Emphasizes discipline and structured classroom interaction	Believes teaching influences students' thought processes	Teaches appropriate social behavior	Embeds good interaction habits into teaching strategies
Handling Student Problems	Identifies academic/personal issues, talks to students	Talks to students to find root problems, avoids assumptions	Ensures all students are okay before class, finds solutions	Re-explains material slowly if students struggle	Encourages peer learning to help struggling students	Uses re-explanation and peer support for difficult concepts
Identifying Student Strengths/Weaknesses	Observes students daily, uses assessments	Uses evaluations and private discussions	Conducts formative and summative assessments, peer evaluations	Takes months to fully assess student capabilities	Uses reflections and end-of-meeting evaluations	Collects student reflections on their learning challenges

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Teacher's Self-Awareness	Acknowledges strengths and weaknesses, constantly learns	Focuses on improving weaknesses through self-awareness	Uses self-reflection, peer evaluation, and coordinator feedback	Confident in self-awareness and problem-solving skills	Believes self-awareness helps in problem-solving	Gained awareness through experience and feedback
Providing Clear Instructions	Always ensures clarity in instructions	Uses written instructions, extra guidance if needed	Spends more time on planning to ensure clarity	Bases clarity on student feedback and performance	Checks student understanding after giving instructions	Uses direct student questions and feedback to adjust instructions
Presenting Meaningful Content	Active learning engagement is key	Relates lessons to real-life experiences	Believes the teacher is the main visual aid, tailors methods to student needs	Uses real-life context, especially for cultural lessons	Ensures lessons are meaningful, especially in cultural/religious topics	Uses strategic selection of activities to increase comprehension
Providing Fair Feedback	Encourages students and recognizes effort	Ensures all students receive attention, encourages shy students	Provides feedback for all students, focuses on struggling learners	Uses rubrics for objective grading	Uses peer correction and rubric-based grading	Bases corrections on effort and rubric, ensures fairness

The teachers varied in their use of teaching materials, as shown in Table 1. Some relied on standardized curricula, while others, like Ms. A and Mr. S, supplemented these with online resources, demonstrating pedagogical flexibility. Instructional strategies also differed, all emphasized student engagement, with Ms. LJ and Mr. R2 focusing on structured classroom interactions, Ms. A utilizing multimedia, and Mr. S and Ms. D employing student-centered approaches. Based on Table 1, each teacher addressed student challenges differently, from personalized assistance (Ms. A and Mr. R1) to peer support and classroom reflections (Mr. S and Ms. D). Additionally, self-awareness played a crucial role in professional development. According to Table 1, teachers acknowledged their strengths and areas for improvement, engaging in peer feedback and reflective practices to enhance their teaching effectiveness. These findings reinforce the significance of adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and

continuous professional growth in EFL teaching, contributing to a deeper understanding of the competencies required for EFL instruction in a diverse context

Ms. LJ, a seasoned EFL teacher at School K, emphasizes "adjusting" rather than experiencing culture shock, as shown in Table 1, which aligns with Ulla (2021) on cultural adaptation. She notes that there is no single teaching strategy that fits all learners, stressing the need for flexible approaches, which resonates with Borg (2006) and (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2014b). Similarly, Ms. A believes that "the way we teach students affects the way they think and interact," as reflected in Table 1, supporting Karousiou et al. (2018).

Ms. A employs a systematic approach to address students' learning difficulties. As indicated in Table 1, she first identifies the specific issues and then re-explains the material at a slower pace. This method aligns with Mr. R1's strategy of understanding the root causes of challenges before taking action, reinforcing best practices in educational psychology (Haryadi, 2003). Ms. A believes that truly understanding students' needs requires time and continuous observation, aligning with reflective teaching principles (Farrell, 2015).

While the teachers' pedagogical strategies differ, Table 1 shows they all emphasize learner-centered approaches. Ms. A integrates multimedia resources, such as YouTube and podcasts, to enhance the listening skills of her students, demonstrating a constructivist approach (Korthagen, 2004; Mustafa et al., 2025). Similarly, Mr. R1 blends traditional textbooks with online resources, showing flexibility in Indonesia's diverse educational landscape (Borg, 2006; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2014). Marsevani (2021) emphasizes the role of student autonomy in language learning, a principle evident in Ms. A's integration of diverse resources. This fosters an environment where students can take more control over their learning, aligning with Marsevani's (2021) assertion that learner autonomy enhances engagement and motivation.

Regarding professional growth, Table 1 indicates that Ms. LJ and Ms. A actively engage in research and self-improvement, aligning with Tarrayo et al. (2021) on the importance of research for teacher development. However, time constraints and limited institutional support hinder their full engagement, mirroring challenges identified by Richards & Farrell (2006), contrasting with more structured Western EFL training programs (Richards & Schmidt, 2013).

The findings from interviews with four Filipino EFL teachers—Ms. LJ, Mr. R1, Mr. R2, and Ms. A—highlight key parameters that contribute to effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Indonesia. These parameters include cultural adaptation, pedagogical strategies, student support, self-awareness, and professional growth. Each of these aspects plays a significant role in shaping the overall effectiveness of EFL instruction, with multiple variables influencing their implementation. The discussion below compares and contrasts these findings with existing literature on foreign language education.

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1. Cultural Adaptation

One of the most critical parameters for effective EFL teaching is the ability to adapt to cultural differences. The teachers interviewed demonstrate varying degrees of adaptation, with Ms. LJ emphasizing the importance of "adjusting" rather than experiencing culture shock. This perspective aligns with Ulla (2021), who asserts that expatriate teachers must embrace cultural flexibility to enhance their teaching efficacy. In contrast, Mr. R1 initially struggled with culture shock but overcame it by immersing himself in local customs, reinforcing the importance of experiential adaptation (Marsevani et al., 2024). Both experiences highlight the necessity of intercultural competence as a variable influencing effective teaching.

2. Pedagogical Strategies

Teaching strategies vary across the four educators, demonstrating the influence of instructional flexibility on effective EFL teaching. Ms. LJ and Mr. R2 emphasize structured classroom interactions, ensuring student engagement through participatory activities, which aligns with Koç (2013) and Harmer (2007). In contrast, Ms. A incorporates multimedia resources, such as YouTube and podcasts, to supplement standard curricula, demonstrating a constructivist approach to language learning (Korthagen, 2004). Similarly, Mr. R1 blends online resources with traditional textbooks, highlighting the role of technological integration in EFL effectiveness. While these strategies vary, they all support learner-centered approaches as essential variables for teaching effectiveness (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2014).

3. Student Support and Classroom Management

A crucial determinant of EFL effectiveness is the level of support provided to students. Ms. A and Mr. R1 emphasize identifying students' learning difficulties and providing tailored support, resonating with best practices in educational psychology (Haryadi, 2003). Additionally, all four teachers stress the significance of feedback mechanisms in maintaining classroom engagement, aligning with Hattie & Timperley (2007). A notable contrast is observed in their classroom management techniques: while Ms. A focuses on a relational approach, fostering trust among students, Mr. R2 relies on structured activities to maintain discipline, reflecting diverse classroom management styles (Hasanah & Utami, 2019).

4. Self-Awareness and Reflective Teaching

Self-awareness is another essential component of effective EFL instruction. Ms. A acknowledges her strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing the importance of self-assessment in improving teaching efficacy. This aligns with Kalay (2017) and Dweck (2006), who highlight reflective teaching as a core variable in teacher effectiveness. Ms. LJ shares a similar perspective, practicing continuous self-reflection, a strategy endorsed by Farrell (2015). In contrast, Mr. R1 and Mr. R2 focus

more on external feedback from students and peers, indicating a difference in self-driven versus externally guided professional development.

5. Professional Growth and Research Engagement

The teachers interviewed demonstrate a strong commitment to professional development, a key factor in enhancing EFL instruction. Ms. LJ and Ms. A actively seek opportunities for research and self-improvement, aligning with Tarrayo et al. (2021) on the role of research in teacher growth. However, challenges such as time constraints and limited institutional support hinder full engagement, echoing findings by Richards & Farrell (2006). A contrast emerges between those who engage in formal research activities (Ms. LJ) and those who rely more on peer collaboration and classroom experimentation (Mr. R1 and Mr. R2), illustrating varying pathways to professional enhancement.

The findings underscore the central role of cultural adaptation, pedagogical flexibility, student support, and self-awareness in fostering effective EFL instruction. While strategies vary, the collective emphasis on learner-centered approaches and continuous professional growth reinforces the need for adaptability in EFL teaching. Filipino teachers in Indonesia, through their varied strategies and professional development practices, demonstrate the essential qualities for navigating the challenges of foreign language teaching. Their insights contribute to the broader conversation about EFL education and highlight the importance of continuous learning and cultural competence in enhancing teaching effectiveness. Moving forward, efforts should focus on further developing institutional support and fostering research engagement to enable teachers to fully realize their potential in diverse educational settings.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide several key contributions to the field of EFL education. It underscores the critical role of adaptability, cultural awareness, and pedagogical flexibility in enhancing the effectiveness of EFL teaching, especially in the multicultural setting of Indonesia. Through the experiences of four Filipino EFL teachers, the study emphasizes the importance of tailoring teaching strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of students, blending structured curricula with supplementary materials to keep students engaged. These teachers' reflections also highlight the significance of self-awareness and continuous professional development in improving teaching practices. From a pedagogical standpoint, the study reinforces the value of adaptive strategies in fostering student engagement and enhancing learning outcomes.

In terms of policy insights, the study suggests that education policies should prioritize professional development programs for foreign language teachers, focusing on cultural sensitivity, teaching adaptability, and the use of diverse teaching materials to meet students' needs in various contexts. Moreover, teacher preparation programs could benefit from integrating these

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areas into their curricula to better prepare educators for the challenges posed by multicultural classrooms.

However, the study has several limitations. The sample size, consisting of only four Filipino teachers, may not fully capture the diversity of experiences and perspectives from other EFL educators in Indonesia or other similar contexts. Additionally, the exclusive reliance on qualitative methods limits the generalizability of the findings. To enrich the understanding of EFL teaching effectiveness, future research should employ a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative techniques such as surveys and pre-and post-tests alongside qualitative interviews, to provide a broader and more robust analysis of the factors influencing teaching effectiveness in diverse classrooms. These future studies could further explore the role of cultural adaptation in teaching and how it impacts student learning, providing deeper insights into the complexities of EFL education in multicultural environments.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

Maya Marsevani, S.Pd., M.Pd., Ph.D, Cand: formulated the study, designed the research methodology including collected and analyzed the data. Author 2 **Nurlaili**, S.Pd., M.Pd., Ph.D.,Cand]: assisted in research writing, especially in theoretical framework and data interpretation, and contributed to proofreading the article.

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