REALITY AND ASPIRATIONS OF FILIPINO ESL TEACHERS IN THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE: A DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the experiences of Filipino ESL teachers who have worked as online teachers for at least two years. The researchers used a descriptive phenomenological method and analyzed interviews from nine participants using Colaizzi's method. Five themes emerged: a) The Lived Experiences of Online ESL Teachers in Building a Successful Online Teaching Career, b) The Perks of Working as an Online ESL Teacher in a Digital Workplace, c) Personal and Professional Growth Aspirations for Career Advancement and Professional Development Opportunities, d) Recommendations to Prospective Applicants and Considerations on Becoming ESL Teachers, and e) Recommendations on Improving Working Conditions and Support for ESL Teachers. Online ESL teachers face rigorous selection procedures and adapt to challenges. Perks include flexibility, convenience, career growth, positive student impact, advanced communication tools, and financial stability. ESL teachers aspire to create a conducive learning environment, continuously improve skills, and pursue professional development opportunities. Prospective applicants should consider their passion, qualifications, communication skills, and adaptability. Improving working conditions involves salary considerations, teacher support, collaboration, and student behavior. The study recommends that ESL companies should improve payment processes, conduct regular salary evaluations, and address student behavior to boost employee satisfaction, motivation, and competitiveness.

Keywords: Reality, Aspirations, Perks, English as a Second Language teacher, Descriptive Phenomenology, Makilala North Cotabato, Kidapawan City

INTRODUCTION

The Online English Teaching Industry is continuously and rapidly expanding in the Philippines. It has been in the country for more than a decade. The demand is rising, and many foreigners from diverse cultural backgrounds are eager to acquire English language proficiency (Cuenca & Angoya, 2019).

Consequently, online teaching is becoming a common practice around the globe and more common in industrialized nations. Online education, often known as e-learning, is not commonly used or formally accepted by educational institutions or governments in underdeveloped countries. On the other hand, it is a popular fact that computers and technology will play a significant role in society. In this context, the development of online or distance learning is awe-inspiring. As a platform for learning new technologies and

gaining new abilities, it has decreased instructors' and students' introversion toward e-learning and technology (Sofi-Karim et al., 2023).

In addition, English as a Second Language (ESL) has developed into a platform that allows more than 10,000 Filipino teachers to work for internet-based teaching sites with overseas students from the convenience of their homes. Online teachers are required to employ effective teaching techniques to assist students in enhancing their conversational abilities and being skilled in the online tools used in online classes. (Javier and Lintao, 2019). Besides that, one of the highest-paying home-based internet occupation is teaching, one of the fields with enormous growth potential (O'Brien, 2021).

Recently, there has been growing interest in Online ESL teaching, which provides a promising platform for both employed and unemployed teachers to develop their skills while providing for their families continuously, consequently enhancing understanding of foreign culture and inclusion of foreign languages in tertiary level curricular programs, particularly in the teacher education curriculum, can be advantageous to potential ESL teachers in general (Sabidalas & Esparar, 2022).

However, the reality and aspirations of online English teachers in the Digital Workplace have yet to receive much attention. Online teaching requires highly demanding skills, and specific regulations and codes of conduct bind teachers. Maintaining a positive demeanor when interacting with students, a substantial amount of patience, and copious energy is imperative. In addition, Online ESL teachers are self-employed and receive no employee benefits, and ESL policies change constantly. Most ESL firms over-hire teachers for student inflow (Wilkinson, 2019).

To demonstrate the continuous shift to digital workplaces in the age of people-less workplaces and the need for leadership and workplace learning. Technology and training on specific systems and tools have been the focus of digital workplace development. Thus, a stronger focus on establishing a common purpose and a holistic image, where systems are part of development, not development (Hult and Bystrom, 2022). Along with this, the career aspirations of Online ESL Teachers are based on their desires and conducting empirical research to investigate employee motivation and the adoption of digital workplace transformation components (Micic et al., 2022).

However, Szanajda, Ou, and Mycue (2019) suggest that further research is necessary to investigate the capability of non-native English speakers to teach the language. Thus, I gained interest in persistently investigating empirical evidence of the lived experience of Filipino Online ESL Teachers as non-native speakers who teach the English language and their capabilities and aspirations to work in online teaching platforms in digital workplaces worldwide.

METHODS

The descriptive phenomenology study is presented in this chapter. Investigate and characterize the lived experiences of individuals within a particular phenomenon. Moreover, This chapter outlines the methodology for data analysis and the research design, participants, and data-gathering procedures. By adopting a rigorous methodology, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the essence and structure of the phenomenon under investigation. The methodology section serves

as a guide to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, enabling the researcher to capture the rich and nuanced subjective experiences of the participants.

Participants and Sampling

The sample for this study consists of nine Filipino ESL teachers residing in Kidapawan City and Makilala, North Cotabato, Philippines. These participants were specifically chosen because of their background and specialization in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in the digital workplace. The selection criteria included a minimum of two years of teaching experience, proficiency in English language instruction, and familiarity with digital tools and platforms commonly used in online teaching.

The participants in this study were chosen through a purposive sampling method. This method was employed to ensure that the selected participants possess the necessary knowledge, experience, and insights related to the reality and aspirations of Filipino ESL teachers in the digital workplace. Kidapawan City and Makilala, located in North Cotabato, were selected as the geographical areas for sampling due to their concentration of ESL teachers and accessibility for data collection.

The researcher contacted ESL teachers in the identified areas through professional networks, educational institutions, and online communities. The goals, methods, and anticipated time commitment of the study were all thoroughly explained to potential participants. Those who expressed interest and met the selection criteria were invited to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step process is a well-known and widely used approach in phenomenological research. This process aims to provide a rigorous analysis that remains closely connected to the data and ensures that the resulting phenomenon description is comprehensive and validated by the participants. Colaizzi's process emphasizes the importance of staying close to the data throughout the analysis, ensuring that the resulting description is grounded in the participants' accounts. By involving the participants in the validation process, the researcher aimed to enhance the credibility and authenticity of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Building a Successful Online Teaching Career

Online ESL teachers face rigorous selection procedures and hiring processes to ensure qualified candidates, including a bachelor's degree, teaching certifications, and proficiency in the English language. Some companies may require prior teaching experience or specialized training in ESL instruction.

The finding aligns with the case study conducted by Pontilas (2021), Qualified applicants are called for an initial interview, followed by a step-by-step process including grammar tests, personality interviews, demonstration teaching, and internet and computer set specifications. If the applicant's computer and internet connectivity are

below standard, they cannot proceed to the next step. Therefore, they are advised to upgrade their devices and consider reapplying. Moreover, Jones (2019) stated that applicants must possess a bachelor's degree, which can be outside of education. This highlights the flexibility in Chinese education standards, prioritizing qualities such as adaptability, the ability to work with children effectively, and a willingness to learn over specific academic qualifications or prior teaching experience.

Essential equipment and infrastructure are crucial for effective online teaching, including a reliable internet connection, a suitable teaching space, and necessary technological tools. These resources significantly impact the quality of instruction and student engagement. The study findings aligned with Jones (2019) teaching online; you must have some home technological equipment for teaching. It contains a laptop, a webcam, a microphone-equipped headphone set, high-speed Internet access, and a computer with an Ethernet cable. It also inclines to Deady (2020) To effectively teach English, Aspiring teachers will need a reliable internet connection, a laptop, an external or built-in webcam, a headset, and a calm, well-lit area.

Challenges and Adaptations in the online ESL teaching environment include power outages, unstable internet connections, language barriers, handling diverse student needs, limited preparation time, and balancing work-life priorities. Technical problems can disrupt lessons; teachers often face penalties for missing classes. Thus, Job security and absences can also be concerns.

Sabidalas and Esparar (2022) highlight the challenges faced by online ESL teachers, such as managing students' negative behavior, diverse learners, maintaining energy, controlling emotions, language barriers, and penalties. Poor internet connectivity, power interruptions, and outages can lead to frustration and loss of focus, affecting their ability to teach effectively online. Cuenca and Angoya (2019) highlight the challenges online teachers face, including managing classes, addressing student behavior, and overcoming technical obstacles, including sluggish internet connections, which further complicate their work.

According to Wilkinson (2019), Online teachers working for ESL companies are often treated as self-employed, without pay for time off, including sick or holiday leave. Their contracts are usually more of an agreement than a written document, and some companies have harsh policies, leading to penalties, fines, and sometimes not receiving additional bonuses. ESL companies frequently update their policies, making it difficult for online teachers to secure fair compensation and support. Pontillas (2021) emphasizes the importance of teachers having two internet connection sources in the Philippines, one fiber-optic and the other wired prepaid. In case of unstable internet connections, a backup connection is used. Additionally, a power battery vehicle serves as a backup electrical supply during a blackout.

Online ESL teachers demonstrate a variety of capabilities and strategies, such as clear pronunciation, a gentle teaching style, creating a welcoming learning environment, using relatable examples, showcasing English proficiency and adaptability, leveraging cultural understanding, employing interactive lessons, excelling in adapting to technology, prioritizing effective communication, committing to professional development, offering helpful criticism, providing knowledge that satisfies students' needs, and emphasizing

patience and understanding.

The findings of this study align with Tajima's (2023) suggestion that by positioning the Philippines alongside English-speaking countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, Filipino teachers are recognized as authentic English speakers. In addition, the study reveals that students play a significant role in shaping the perception of teacher legitimacy based on their own opinions of English and their ideal characteristics of an English language teacher. Domingo (2022) revealed that Filipino teachers are gaining recognition as alternative private online language education (POLE) teachers in East and Southeast Asia. Their linguistic skills and awareness of the concept can make them highly competitive in the POLE market. A training program for non-native teachers is designed to benefit higher education and online schools.

Motivations and benefits attract individuals to pursue a career in online teaching, including the opportunity to positively impact students' lives, the flexibility and convenience of remote work, career growth, and the chance to connect with students from diverse backgrounds. ESL teachers have reasonable salaries.

The result conforms with Sabidalas and Esparar (2022). Teaching ESL online has several benefits, such as improving ICT proficiency, gaining insight into students' cultures, employing effective teaching techniques, managing the classroom, and improving communication abilities. Making money for themselves and their families also gives instructors stability. Additionally, flexible online education enables teachers to complete their work from home at their own speed and without stress. Teaching ESL online presents a wealth of chances for improvement.

The Perks of Working as an Online ESL Teacher in a Digital Workplace

Flexibility in time and location is another significant advantage, allowing teachers to set their schedules and work from their preferred workspace, promoting better work-life balance. Online teaching also eliminates commuting stress and expenses, as teachers can avoid the daily commute to a physical classroom, saving time and reducing transportation costs.

Deady (2020) One notable advantage is the flexibility to determine their preferred working hours, allowing teachers to decide how many or how few hours they wish to work. Furthermore, the income earned is solely dependent on the efforts and dedication of the teachers themselves. ESL teaching online offers immense freedom, allowing you to teach anywhere and anytime without needing to be tied to your home. This eliminates the stress of commuting and traffic. A global talent pool is available for online ESL teachers, fostering collaboration and cultural exchange. Online teaching platforms offer advanced communication tools that enable teachers to engage with students in real-time, providing individualized support and meaningful connections.

The result adheres to (Jones 2019) Online teaching is undoubtedly a fantastic job that is both financially and emotionally fulfilling if you appreciate trying new things, learning about various cultures, and helping others. Remember that if you want something flexible that pays you well, teaching online can be a terrific way to generate additional money without leaving your house. Deady (2020) teaching English online is also perfect for adventure seekers, allowing them to experience living in various countries without

worrying about running out of savings. Additionally, it eliminates the hassle of applying for a working visa.

Online ESL teaching offers numerous benefits, including access to internet-based training programs, flexible scheduling, and the ability to work from anywhere. A range of resources are available for teachers.   Moreover, they learn at their own pace in this flexible work environment, enabling them to improve their instructional practices continually.

Pontillas (2021) revealed that ESL Company provides its staff free access to an online TESOL Certificate Program. The training is delivered online, and to participate, participants must pass an assessment and complete the necessary number of hours. Encouraging teachers to remain with the company and improving their teaching competencies are two benefits of the free TESOL certification course that guarantees high-quality services for students. In addition to TESOL training, the company also offers Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) training, which includes approaches for dealing with young students in ESL/EFL settings and involves reading and situational analysis to pass the assessment.

The digital environment also promotes professional growth and knowledge sharing. Online ESL teaching typically does not involve salary deductions, providing financial stability and security. Teachers can also save time and effort by accessing prepared lesson materials and resources provided by online platforms, allowing them to focus on delivering high-quality instruction and providing individualized student support.

The result complies with Yalina and Rozas (2020) The digital workplace concept can lead to a cost-effective, efficient, and waste-free work environment, reducing commute, paper, and waste. This not only improves budget efficiency but also enhances transportation cost efficiency. Simulations have shown that the digital workplace can significantly improve employee fuel consumption for work trips.

These salary incentives serve as a motivating factor for ESL teachers, encouraging them to perform at their best and providing them with opportunities for financial growth and recognition within their profession.

The result conforms to Deady (2022) online ESL teachers have the potential to earn a substantial income by teaching English online, with numerous websites offering remarkable advantages and incentives for teachers. Wilkinson (2019) Employees in large corporate companies often expect additional benefits such as pensions, healthcare, pay raises, and sometimes bonuses like a company car, in addition to their regular pay package.

Personal and Professional Growth Aspirations for Career Advancement and Professional Development Opportunities

The Aspiration and Goal in Teaching as an ESL Teacher focuses on creating a conducive learning environment for students to learn and gain new knowledge. ESL teachers aim to inspire students to love the English language and develop their skills to meet their needs, ensuring smooth lesson delivery and student satisfaction. They strive for continuous development and improvement in ESL teaching, recognizing online opportunities for personal growth and acquiring new skills.

The findings align with Pontillas (2021) that online ESL teachers experience the satisfaction of being valued by their students and witnessing their growth. By guiding and supporting their students' language development, teachers build strong relationships and foster a sense of trust.

The Aspiration for Personal and Professional Growth focuses on continuous development and improvement in ESL teaching. ESL teachers aim to inspire students to learn meaningfully, improve English language skills, and advance their careers through higher qualifications and professional development. They also strive for fluent English communication, overcoming nervousness, and improving speaking fluency.

The findings comply with Sabidalas and Esparar (2022), Possibilities for Online Education and Growth in Teaching ESL. The participants shared their thoughts honestly. They believe their professional experience is essential to their development while working because it offers a career route through their involvement in professional growth initiatives and obtaining promotions through instruction. Inclined to Kendra (2021) highlights the role of extrinsic and intrinsic factors in career aspirations, which often involve acquiring relevant accomplishments, experiences, abilities, personal development, self-awareness, or external factors like wealth or reputation.

The Career Advancement and Professional Development Opportunities focus on pursuing opportunities that contribute to the growth and advancement of ESL teachers' careers. ESL teachers aim to pursue a teaching career in specific locations, such as Japan, as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT). They seek to gain experience in professional and curriculum development, explore leadership roles in online education companies, and gain confidence through daily interactions with students. They may also consider pursuing a master's degree and carefully consider factors before going abroad.

The result supported by Deady (2020) Teaching English online can provide valuable ESL experience, enhancing resumes and attracting potential employers. Many Teach Away employees were previously online instructors, and some hold top positions at the largest EdTech company. Online teaching offers personal, professional, and financial growth opportunities for professionals seeking career growth and financial independence.

According to Sabidalas and Esparar (2022), Enhancing understanding of foreign cultures and incorporating foreign languages in tertiary-level curricular programs can benefit potential ESL teachers. Wilkinson (2019) teaching English in physical classrooms and virtual learning environments requires honed skills, which can be significantly enhanced by firsthand experience, which can help potential employers notice your job application when securing a full-time job teaching English abroad.

Recommendations to the Prospective Applicants and Considerations on Becoming ESL Teachers"

Becoming an ESL teacher requires a genuine passion for teaching and a love for language learning. Applicants should reflect on their enthusiasm for helping others acquire new skills and their ability to adapt to different cultural contexts. Applicants should assess their qualifications and educational background. Most ESL teaching positions

require at least a bachelor's degree. In contrast, some may require additional certifications or TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). Proficiency in the target language is crucial for effective ESL teaching. Fluency and a strong understanding of grammar and vocabulary will significantly enhance the teaching experience.

The findings conform to Domingo's (2022) statement that the demand for high English proficiency from non-native speakers acknowledges the need for teachers to possess a strong command of the language they teach. It ensures that educators can accurately convey information, provide clear instructions, and facilitate meaningful student interactions. Sabidalas and Esparar (2022) argue that online ESL teaching has expanded teachers' horizons, enabling them to gain knowledge of various languages, cultures, and international pupils.

Prospective ESL applicants should reflect on their communication and cultural understanding skills, as well as their adaptability. They should research professional development opportunities for growth as educators. Additionally, they should consider the demand for ESL teachers in their desired location and explore various career paths in schools, language institutes, online platforms, or abroad.

The result aligns with Wilkinson (2019) Teaching students online requires a unique skill set compared to teaching in the classroom. Personality is just as important as qualifications in online teaching. Successful online teachers possess qualities such as building relationships with students and parents, engaging students of all abilities and personalities, patience, adaptability, creativity, and passion for their work. They should be able to adjust and learn new ways to engage students and evaluate what works. Be passionate about their work and support students' progress. It is essential to be aware of the unique needs and behaviors of each student and adapt accordingly.

Recommendations on Improving Working Conditions and Support for ESL Teachers

Improving the Payment Process and Salary Considerations. To address salary concerns and ensure fair compensation for teachers, the following steps are essential. Streamlining the payment process is crucial to avoid salary delays. Implementing efficient systems and technologies can help ensure timely and accurate payments. It is important to provide teachers with reasonable remuneration. Regular evaluations of salary rates should be conducted to ensure they are competitive and reflective of the teachers' skills and experience. Particularly for new teachers, it is necessary to review rate policies. Low rates can discourage talented individuals from entering the profession. Adjusting rates to align with industry standards and considering incentives for new teachers can help attract and retain quality educators.

The result conforms to Pontillas (2021) after the lesson and completion of their lesson notes, online ESL teachers always see their total earnings shown on their teacher's account. Teachers start out with P50.00 every class, and when they advance to the next level, they will also receive a pay raise. Promotions for teachers are determined by the number of lessons taught and the grades their students have received.

Enhancing Teacher Support, Collaboration, and Student Behavior. Providing comprehensive support to teachers is crucial. It includes offering diverse materials, fostering open communication among educators, and facilitating effective collaboration to encourage continuous improvement. The absenteeism policy must be reviewed in order to keep teachers from becoming discouraged. Offering flexible options and accommodating unforeseen circumstances can provide a more supportive work environment. Maintaining a positive and productive classroom atmosphere requires addressing student behavior. Ensuring that students respect their teachers and establishing clear behavior expectations are crucial.

The findings conform to Pontillas (2021), highlighting the challenges teachers face in creating interactive classes, as some students use their home comforts to display disruptive behaviors. Stage mothers protect their children, and parents often believe they are better than teachers. The company is strict about punctuality, imposing penalties for tardiness or absence. Many teachers complain about the inhumane treatment of missed classes. Missed classes can occur due to power interruptions or internet connection issues. The company ensures teachers are paid for their time and effort, but some teachers feel the company needs to consider their concerns. The company has a computer system that locks teachers' accounts for absences, but they must undergo coaching before removing it. Deady (2020) Online teachers often need help when treated as self-employed, meaning they are not paid for time off during sick or holiday periods. Some companies have harsh policies for sick or holiday leave, leading to penalties, fines, and sometimes not receiving additional bonuses offered by their company.

IMPLICATIONS

Online ESL teaching offers flexibility, financial stability, and career growth opportunities for teachers. However, it also presents challenges such as technical issues, language barriers, and balancing work-life priorities. To overcome these obstacles, researchers can provide insights into the selection procedures for online teachers, including qualifications, equipment, and infrastructure.

Prospective ESL teachers should have a genuine passion for teaching and language learning and assess their qualifications, educational background, communication skills, cultural understanding, and adaptability. They should also research professional development opportunities and consider the demand for ESL teachers in desired locations. Fluency in the target language and a strong understanding of grammar and vocabulary are also crucial for effective teaching.

Improving ESL online companies' work conditions is essential to streamline the payment process and ensure fair compensation for teachers. Providing comprehensive support, fostering collaboration and communication among teachers, and addressing student behavior are essential factors in enhancing the working environment.

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