

“Paghimakas”: Lived Experiences of Filipino Teachers in Thailand during the Pandemic



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ABSTRACT:

Background/Objectives: This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of the Filipino teachers, specifically the Teacher Education (TED) graduates of Northern Iloilo Polytechnic State College in the Kingdom of Thailand.

Methods/Statistical analysis: A qualitative method was used to understand the subjective experiences and insights of the five participants who were purposely-selected for being graduates of the Teacher Education Program of NIPSC and employed as teachers in Thailand. Using the online medium, Messenger, they were interviewed as to their experiences and challenges encountered by working at a foreign country. Bracketing strategy was used to demonstrate validity. Answers were sent back in the form of a narrative, encoded, and interpreted to identify the themes. Participants were told that their responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will be utilized for this study alone and they will be coded to hide their identities.

Findings: The participants viewed their experiences as full of opportunities through landing a job in a foreign country and proving their worth as good professional teachers. They also considered them as challenging because they were able to use their knowledge and skills learned and compete with other teachers in a foreign country and survive amidst conflicts in the workplace, thus made them enjoy their teaching career. They performed well in school and gained praises for work well done. Their experiences also contributed to their personal and professional growth by gaining self-confidence, trust in their potentials, and plan to improve their lives. This study also showed that despite the pandemic, the participants remained steadfast, prayerful, and have their good values intact worthy of emulation. This study may have contributed to the scant literature about the struggles of Filipino teachers to excel in their profession in a global arena by maintaining their personal and professional identities, providing evidence that they have embraced their roles as positive contributors to their learners and school communities, have overcome challenges in a foreign country, and have served as inspiration to educators to strive for excellence.

Novelty/Applications: The findings of this study could serve as an inspiring note for everyone seeking for greener pasture whether here in the country or abroad. This also proved that TED graduates are resilient and strive to survive in any situation as good professionals.

KEYWORDS: TED Graduates, COVID 19 pandemic, Opportunities, Challenges, Growth, Thailand

1. INTRODUCTION

For Filipino teachers striving for greener pasture, going abroad is considered a great opportunity to work, to earn a living, to provide for the needs of the family, and to see other places. This is also considered as a challenge especially for fresh graduates to prove their worth in the global arena and share their knowledge and skills to students and the educational community they are in. Since it is evident that culture in other countries are different from their own, it is considered as a challenge for the TED graduates to blend with the students, their fellow teachers, and with the community and strive to excel professionally in a foreign land. *Paghimakas* or *pagbakas* is an *Ilonggo* term which means struggle to survive and be at pace with the challenges of the times and considered to be suited to the way how the TED teachers in Thailand survive amidst difficult situations in life.

In 2001, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra opened Thailand for teaching employment as it prepared for ASEAN integration thus paving the way for the migration of Filipino professionals who are seeking jobs. However, most job seekers from the Philippines are classified as tourists. Being categorized as global work force, the Filipino workers continue to seek personal development to remain competitive in their chosen fields to improve quality of life through income, livelihood, and job security. Therefore, achieving higher education, accreditations and recognition from both the sending and receiving countries, are considered

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capital investments to continue working abroad. It was noted that most Filipino teachers in Thailand teach in *anuban* (pre-school), *phratom* (elementary) and *mathayum* (high school). Few Filipinos are able to teach in the university level where professional development is highly esteemed in the academic community and they are pressured to improve their teaching methods as well as seeking avenues to improve their professions to ensure that their employers will renew their contracts yearly ^[7].

On the other hand, Thai culture is recognized as hierarchical and authoritative and that culture and language are interrelated and influence the way students relate to their teachers in classroom settings. Teachers are often perceived as knowledgeable and a representative of moral goodness and students need to believe in what they say. This teacher authority is much likely to promote teacher-centered classrooms which resulted in difficulty to get the ideas and for the students to be expressive ^[1]. To emphasize, education is always considering the foundation of every nations' economic development; thus, the government must invest knowledge for the entire citizens. Education always helps members of society by providing essential understanding and expertise to become functional individuals. It is true that education is an investment for every person ^[2]. Education is considered as a tool to reduce poverty in order to improve people's lives; in fact, many people have overcome living in poverty by finishing their studies, landing a job, and earning their salary to provide for their needs, and even put up their own investments.

People, in reality, have the drive to achieve full potential in any situations. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs shows that “man has basic needs, such as nourishment and safety, toward the bottom, and self-actualization at the top. He argued that people who reach self-actualization—activating their self-perceived human potential, exhibit what he called a “coherent personality syndrome ^[3].” To add, Maslow stressed that “self-actualized people tended to be creative, compassionate, realistic, and drawn to helping others ^[3].” In relation, Viktor Frankl was an existential psychologist whose theories backed up the idea that individuals have the capacity to shape their own lives, thereby strengthening their character and virtues ^[3].

COVID 19 pandemic has created a world problem that affected the lives of everyone. School closures as part of measures to control the spread of Covid-19 pose challenges that transformed the face of education around the world. The closing of some schools has significant ramifications on the learning process because it means the educational trajectory of students is halted and their learning and development is impeded or even stopped. Furthermore, as students become more isolated amid this new social setting, they are prone to suffer from mental and emotional traumas caused by isolation and solitude -- something that is affecting almost everyone. As a response to the crisis in Thailand, the Education Minister has convinced educators to shift their education services to virtual and online classes. This crisis has swept over the Thai education system like a tsunami and has created a lot of unfavourable situations. This new normal scenario caused teachers to make urgent interventions to help teachers, students, and parents connect with learning materials that are already available, or otherwise improvise or innovate for a dynamic and successful teaching and learning experience ^[4].

It is evident that Filipino teachers in Thailand are struggling with their personal and professional lives after schools closed in attempt to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Although they are still technically employed, many are hired under a "no work, no pay" status which enabled them to survive with no income until schools reopen again. Many teachers have been out of work since mid-March 2020 when the Education Ministry ordered schools across the country to shut down. Therefore, when there are no classes, they do not get paid. Most Filipino teachers are affected by this and are on a no work, no pay set-up, instead they are hired through agencies and they are the ones who pay the salaries ^[4]. Their *paghimakas* or struggle for life in a foreign country is real in order to survive in the teaching profession amidst this new normal setting.

Due to these scenarios, the researcher finds it interesting to know the personal reasons of the Filipino teachers, specifically the Teacher Education graduates of NIPSC for working in Thailand, their struggles to prove their worth as professional in a foreign country, thus their *paghimakas* to realize their dreams in life. To add, the researcher wanted to know how they overcome the difficulties in their profession caused by the COVID 19 pandemic. Their lived experiences could serve as an inspiration to other Teacher Education graduates to bring out the best in themselves in terms of employment. Thus, this study was conducted.

II. METHODS

Research Design

This phenomenological study explored the lives and experiences of Filipino teachers specifically Teacher Education graduates working as public and private teachers in the Kingdom of Thailand. Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that the specific focus is to identify the inherent and unchanging in the meaning of the issue under study ^[5]. Bracketing strategy was utilized as a means of demonstrating the validity of the data collection and analysis process. Therefore, efforts were made by researcher to put aside “repertoires of knowledge, beliefs, values and experiences in order to accurately describe participants' life experiences ^[5].” This study also sought to understand their various plight and experiences from their application to Thai schools up to the time of employment, adjustments to culture, peers, and students; to present the personal and professional development undertaken; find out the struggles and the issues confronting them as foreign workers; and how they cope with change brought about by the pandemic.

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Participants

The researcher purposely-selected seven (7) TED graduates who are currently teaching in Thailand and were chosen based on the following criteria: they are all TED Graduates; they are teaching in Thai schools; and they are accessible to the researcher via online medium such as Facebook and messenger; and they are the only TED graduates in Thailand as per information traced by the researcher. However, only five out of seven responded to the researcher and were considered as participants. There were two females and three males; teaching in the elementary level during the conduct of the study. One participant is a Bachelor of Secondary Education graduate while the four others were Bachelor of Elementary Education graduates. One female participant has nine years teaching experience, the other one has two (2) years teaching experience, while the three male participants have 10-12 years of teaching experience. As to status of employment, two participants were on permanent status, two are on contractual status, and one on temporary status. Two of the participants are teaching in the private schools while the three are teaching in the government school, private bilingual school, and public school.

Locale of the Study

The locale of the study is the Kingdom of Thailand where all the participants were working as teachers in the elementary level during the conduct of the study. Specifically, these participants were living at Plapak District, Nakhon Phanom Province; Bangkok; Huahin, Prachuapkhirikhan; Amphur Mueang, Sisaket; and Chonburi.

Research Instrument

The researcher utilized researcher-made questionnaire which were semi-structured and asked the participants to answer based on their experiences and their situations in an open mindset. The questionnaire was sent through online medium, the Messenger. Answers were done in narrative and sent back to the researcher for thematic analysis and interpretation.

Data Gathering Procedure

To conduct this study, the researcher sent information to the participants that they were chosen to participate in this study based on the following criteria: graduates of the Teacher Education Program of NIPSC and employed as teachers in the Kingdom of Thailand.

To gather data, the researcher sent interview questions via messenger. Bracketing strategy was utilized to demonstrate validity in phenomenology^[6]. Thorough planning for doing bracketing in this study was done before the data collection and analysis process, to determine the sequential relationship of data. Answers were sent back in the form of a narrative which were encoded and interpreted to identify the themes. Participants were told that their responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will be utilized for this study alone. They will be coded to protect their identities and only the researcher has the sole access to data gathered.

However some of the participants were not able to answer all the eleven questions sent through messenger so they were left blank during the thematic analysis and interpretation. The study was conducted from June 2020 to June 2021 and each participant was given two weeks to answer the interview. Follow-up interviews were also done and messages were sent for three months and more due to the pandemic since some of them were not able to send back their answers on time.

Ethical Considerations

This study observed the following ethical principles throughout the conduct of the study:

Right to Self-Determination. The participants were given full autonomy to decide as to whether they may participate or may not in this research study without compulsion. The researchers respected and accepted their refusal to participate in this study.

Right to Full Disclosure. The participants may receive accurate and understandable explanations of the purpose of this research. The researchers ensured that the participants fully understand the risks and benefits of participation in this study.

Using the online medium, Messenger, the participants were interviewed as to their experiences encountered from applying to working at a foreign country. Answers were sent back in the form of a narrative, encoded, and interpreted to identify the themes. Participants were told that their responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality, will be utilized for this study alone, and they will be coded to hide their identities.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data gathered from the participants were analyzed and discussed based on themes.

Theme 1. Opportunities

Job Application and Preparation

Ron was referred by a friend under Thai agency. Ron attended seminar and orientation regarding policies and regulations of the school before the school semester started. In line with this, the school head discussed with him ways to develop teaching strategies, teaching materials, and maintaining classroom discipline. He said he will just continue teaching in Thailand wherein he can have his own “personal income to develop his personal advancement by having personal business.”

Nar had her aunt and uncle came first to the Thailand to venture in teaching job, and she her coming to this country was facilitated. She believed that all the knowledge, skills, and talents he acquired during his student days made him “fully-equipped

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and well-prepared to do the job”. He added that it did not come easy for him but he was “a stand out among the applicants during the teaching demonstration and panel interview”. She said that she is almost nine years in her present school and “have earned the trust and confidence” of her peers and her administrators. She added that she “started rough making all the adjustments yet managed my sails... but that complacent to just let it that way for there are still challenges that arise and I know that there are always room for improvement. I am now in the management team and looking forward to be in the higher position.”

Joe has his sister-in-law recommend him to the manager/co-owner of the school. He “prayed for God’s guidance for safety and good health, and for wisdom and knowledge to teach well”. He also believed that motivation is very important. On the other hand his future plans are: “to save money first and then think about a good business (in our country). If I have still time to study, I will study for my master’s degree in education.”

Tin was able to find a job through his co-church member. He said he did not prepare much but brought with him “overflowing self-confidence and fervent prayer to stand out as an effective teacher”. Tin said he was just trapped in a profession which he is not inclined with because he wants to become a flight attendant which has been his dream. But he did not ever belittle this (teaching) profession which had helped him through thick and thin. He said, “I will pursue this profession I guess instead of pushing myself to being a flight attendant which I think is not really for me. I also plan to work at factories and restaurants if there is an opportunity and to fulfill my greatest desires which are to give my family a beautiful house to stay in and build my own coffee shop in the future.”

Net found a job through direct application. She prepared all the documents needed for applying a work visa and studied the educational system of Thailand. She said if she is going to foresee herself as to professional and personal advancement, she will be participating in a professional organization. She added that she is very open to whatever opportunities the future may hold, especially within her company. She said she is proud of herself for being flexible and adaptable and said that “the best way of planning for the future is to make the most of the present. I applied for this teaching job because it is a perfect fit with my skill set.”

The five participants have different experiences of landing a teaching job in the Kingdom of Thailand. It can be considered a great opportunity to apply and be qualified in a teaching job, especially in a foreign country although there are lots of things to consider such as family, qualifications, preparation, and culture. To be professionally qualified for a teaching job, mental, emotional, physical, and psychological preparations are necessary so that one can deliver his tasks and responsibilities very well. Being in Thailand is indeed an opportunity to practice one’s teaching profession and other greater things to do in life, both for personal and professional advancement.

Tables 1 and 2 show the responses of the participants.

Table 1. Process of Job Application

Participants	Responses
Ron	Referred by a friend under Thai agency
Nar	Invited by her aunt and uncle who first ventured in teaching in Thailand
Joe	Sister-in-law’s recommendation to the manager/co-owner of the school
Tin	Co-church member
Net	Direct application

Table 2. Preparation for the Job

Participants	Responses
Ron	Attended seminar and orientation regarding the policies and regulations of the school. A discussion on how to develop teaching strategies, teaching materials, maintain classroom discipline was done by the employer
Nar	Believed she is fully-equipped with in her knowledge, skills, and talents acquired in her studies. Determined to outstand other applicants during teaching demos and panel interviews
Joe	Prayed for God’s guidance to be safe and healthy; to be given wisdom and knowledge. Motivated himself to do his best.
Tin	Overflowing confidence and fervent prayer to become an effective teacher
Net	Prepared all documents needed for working visa. Studied education system of Thailand

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Theme 2. Challenges

Problems encountered with students and coping strategies, problems encountered with fellow teachers and coping strategies, homesickness and coping strategies, problems encountered during the pandemic and coping strategies and measures

Ron was able to encounter students' unwillingness, not having interest in the lesson, and lack of communication in the classroom. He was able to handle these by “giving activities which can develop their interest and engage them towards hands-on activities with the use of critical thinking and oral communication skills”. Ron did not see any problem since students are able to comply with every assignment given to them. Ron thought the only problem with his Thai fellows is the communication since most of them could not speak and understand the English language, and he is just showing a good relationship towards them. Ron is living with the school's accommodation wherein electricity, water, and things needed are provided; it is located at the back of the school building. He stayed with Thai teachers since “houses are just near with each other.” When asked as to difficulty encountered in the places they live, Ron, who lives in Plapak District, Nakhon Phanom Province said he has not encountered difficulties because he lives inside the school compound and he is safe there. All the things that he needed are provided and the market is just a walking distance away from his school. Ron said it is normal to feel sad sometimes since he is living away from his family but “with the help of internet and smart phones” they usually talked. Ron said COVID 19 has brought a lot of difficulties in every family most especially to an OFW like him; it affected his source of income and special and tutorial classes. He added that he cannot provide the needs of his family regularly. And since he is living far away from his family, he does not know what will happen to them or what situations they are into right now. So he said he will just continue doing his class, and join his friends to unwind from working for several months during classes, although they cannot go outside of their place due to the pandemic as they need to safeguard themselves. This pandemic has also caused psychological effect such as lack of interaction with other people. Ron said “the Department of Education of Thailand proposed for online classes during this pandemic to continue providing quality education to students using Google classroom in order to cover up the lessons that are supposedly be taught every month. However, it is on trial and error because some students could not have online learning materials such as stable connectivity, PCs, and smart phones.

Nar had observed that in Thailand, there is really a huge distinction when it comes to their system of education compared to that in the Philippines. In her school, it is fine to include in one class the SPED and normal students due to their no discrimination culture and religious practices. They have also a “peculiar way in grading system for they follow a no failure policy in which everyone in the class including the special ones should not be left behind and must move up”. Nar had issues about culture and had truly considered this especially in providing activities that involve movements and touching because there are certain body parts that are not allowed to touch like the head; “a male teacher should never touch his girl student not even a tap”. Nar said her fellow Filipino teachers are understandable when it comes to their ways, traits, behaviors, and work ethics. In her tenure of work in Thailand, she could say that “Filipinos are far more innovative, diligent, and resourceful enough in every teaching endeavor” compared to Thai teachers. Nar said her fellow Filipino teachers are understandable when it comes to their ways, traits, behaviors, and work ethics. In her tenure of work in Thailand, she could say that “Filipinos are far more innovative, diligent, and resourceful enough in every teaching endeavor” compared to Thai teachers. Nar is presently living in a condominium a couple mile away from the main city where “everything is accessible like shopping malls, wet market, grocery stores, schools and hospitals.” Nar, who is living in Bangkok, also had not encountered any problem in the place she lives, as she said “everything is fine.” Nar said homesickness is not in her book anymore because she has her own growing family now and her parents are living with her in Thailand. She added that she missed some things like relatives and friends, her town, the city, Filipino foods, and her alma mater.

Joe, on the other hand was able to encounter attitudes and behavior problems among his students towards learning and sometimes with their “language as a barrier and well as their reading comprehension skills”. Joe said he did not like the “on-the-spot substitution or instant substitution if there is an absent teacher”. He also encountered “crab mentality and jealousy” among his fellow teachers. To overcome this challenge, he let his students know his rules and regulations inside and outside the classroom, always motivated them to study harder, and let them realize the importance of learning in their lives. He said he does not have a choice but “accept the teaching assignments” with all his heart “without complain” and just do his best to teach well every day. Joe, on the other hand added that the system of the school is a bit difficult and some teachers did not treat him well during his starting years especially since he was a newbie. He said he just only thought about “the positivity and good vibes every day”, and ignoring his colleagues is the best way to do. Because of that he was able to show them some respect which in turn made them respect him in return. Lastly, he said he is a professional person, so he did his work “with professionalism.” Joe has been living for a decade here in Huahin City in Prachuapkhirikhan province. This place is one of the famous places in Thailand which is similar to Boracay in terms of beaches. Huahin has many parks to amuse you, beaches for you to relax and has many artistic temples for to amaze you. This is a peaceful city and I really love to live here or even spend my vacation which really need.” Joe, who lives in Huahin, Prachuapkhirikhan, found difficulty in transportation especially in riding motorbikes or small jeepney called “*Toktok*” is expensive, so he bought his own motorbike. Joe, on the other hand felt homesickness during his first year in Thailand. It was a bit difficult for him especially dealing with people because he needed to converse in English even though he was talking to Filipino teachers. He was also new to their foods as well, so he could not eat well. He recalled a moment that he cried, but he was thankful to God for His

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guidance; he prayed every time he felt sad and bad because he believes that “prayer is one of the powerful weapons in the world”. To overcome this homesickness, he I tried his very best to work well and he found some friends to help him to build his “self-confidence.” Joe said everyone is suffering especially himself. He is supposed to go back home to the Philippines, but because of this pandemic it was canceled. he felt bad with it because he missed his family a lot. In addition, he needed to stay at home most of the time and be careful enough. He said he was totally worried about this pandemic especially when his school decided to open and let our students go back to school and he is not sure what to do. “I am not sure if my students are CoVid-free because they came from different places of this country.” He said he made himself calm and the school has its own precautions and safety to the teachers. Moreover, “this pandemic makes me realize that I am not only a teacher to my students, but I am their light in their time of darkness.” On the other hand, Joe said his school had safety and precautions implemented to students and teachers focusing on personal hygiene and good grooming such as taking a shower every day, before going to school and after school (the moment we arrived at home, we must take a shower); wear face shield and mask every time they are inside the school especially during their classes; and bring alcohol always. Their classrooms were cleaned by janitors and they have scheduled time to turn on and turn off the air conditioners. Each table in every classroom has its own shield and social distancing is highly emphasized. “We let our students tick their own work, clean up (sanitized) their table after each of their classes, and we totally (tell them to) avoid hanging out with each other during their break time and teach them about social distancing. For now, their school is back to normal because the Kingdom of Thailand announced already that they are CoVid-free locally.” Joe said he went to the church with friends and hang-out with them during his extra time especially during holidays.”

Net said when she arrived at school, she was surprised to learn that the foreign teacher’s office was separate from the Thai teachers’ and she could hardly interact with the Thai teachers. During her first week of teaching, she felt like a rock star. She had the undivided attention because she was new and “they were so excited to hear what I had to say. I am very lucky in that I use PowerPoint in all of my classes and I have access to every resource possible. All Thai schools are different and everyone has different experiences so don’t compare your school, students, or experiences with others. Culture shock is real and it hits you at the worst times. Embrace it and talk to your family and friends about it.” She was also able to encounter language barrier among her students. She has problems as to the books they are using in their school which are “not aligned with the school curriculum”. What she did was “made lesson plans based on the contents of the books which intends to reach the learning capacity of the learners”. Net is staying in Chonburi, one of the biggest provinces in Thailand which is near Bangkok. This place is very accessible walking distance malls, bus terminals, and her workplace. Net, who lives in Chonburi, had not encountered any difficulty in her place since the days she arrived. Net, on the other hand was not able to experience homesickness maybe because she “always reach out” to her family and friends. On the other hand, Net said during the first three months of pandemic, she earned only half of her monthly salary but it can sustain for her needs for the next months. The school owner proposed to use online platform in teaching so the teachers earned extra income aside from the salary.” To add, Net said their school owner proposed to use online platform in teaching and both teachers and students benefit from it.”

Tin said that teachers anywhere cannot avoid different behaviors of the students such as “being naughty, talkative, and disrespectful” which he himself had encountered; he stressed that those are normal in the teaching field. Tin considered the teaching assignment as the “hardest part” because whenever he gives homework, only few students pass the outputs. He said he tried to understand that matter because most of the people, especially parents coming from the provinces do not know how to speak English much so perhaps they could not help their children in their homework. As regards to Tin, he was not able to encounter any problem at all because his fellow teachers have been accommodating, very welcoming and very kind especially his fellow adviser in the classroom who has been with him for 10 years. The very problem of foreign teachers in Thailand are the students, and he was able to encounter that kind of problem, himself. He further said that at first, it was hard for him to adjust teaching Grade 2 students but as the years passed, he eventually got their attention “by giving them incentives and finding ways to make them smile and happy.” Net admitted that the challenge being with her fellow teachers in her school is “language barrier”. On the other hand, Tin is living in the Province of Sisaket which is a small and peaceful province in which everywhere is accessible such as malls, parks, and markets that are just a few meters away. The province holds its annual festival called “Dok Lamduan Festival” (Lamduan Flower Festival) on the second week of March. Dok Lamduan means Lamduan flower. Fruits, vegetables and rice in this province are pretty cheaper compared to other provinces. It also holds its annual Fruit festival in June where durian is being highlighted the most. It has many tourist attractions like scenic views of mountains and rocks near the border of Cambodia, fascinating ruins, and temples.” Tin, who lives in Amphur Mueang, Sisaket also bought his own motorbike said most of the people in the provinces used to go anywhere with their motorbikes and cars. “At first, it was hard for me to deal with walking to school or to the market because I feel shy. Seldom can you see the locales walking on the street not like in the Philippines. But when I had my personal motorbike, things have gotten easier.” Tin said he cannot assure everyone that Thailand is really for them or waiting for them but he can commend that this place can create an enormous space in ones’ heart; it is a memorable place for teaching career or just plain vacation. He added that Thailand is “for someone who wants to have a BIG SMILE on his/her face as what it has been denoted as “the Land of Smiles’. He wanted everyone to remember that “Failure will never overtake you if your determination to succeed is strong enough”, so better go confidently in the direction of your dreams and live the life you have imagined.” Tin said many things were affected by this pandemic

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such as work, personal business, and health. This pandemic caused a lot of troubles and problems but on the “spiritual aspect, it is a wake-up call to every human to be closer to our Almighty Creator, to seek His guidance and protection amidst this pandemic”. Media brought a lot of negative effects to humanity but in some certainties, it brought positive impact to some circumstances. Tin said that “obeying government’s policies, maintaining personal hygiene, and self-precautions were some of the measures that are keeping us safe. And we were able to continuously deliver education through online classes using media.” Tin said many things were affected by this pandemic such as work, our personal businesses and most especially health but on the other hand, in spiritual aspect, it was a wake-up call to every human to be closer to our Almighty Creator, to seek His guidance and protection amidst this pandemic. By obeying government’s policies, maintaining personal hygiene and self-precautions were some of the measures that have been keeping us safe.”

Among the challenges encountered by the TED graduates in Thailand is the surge of the COVID pandemic. They said they were much affected by the pandemic as to their work and personal concerns. Challenges encountered every day in the most important areas of life can have big impacts on men’s mental health. It is really tough if those challenges are never resolved and still cause a strong reaction and stress ^[7]. To survive in a teaching job at a foreign country is an achievement considering that language is a barrier, culture is different, and the impression of being a foreign teacher quite makes a mark. The participants of this study had encountered varied challenges as teachers to their students, with their teaching assignments, and with their fellow teachers, and being far away from home, but they have their own ways of coping with these challenges.

Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 show the responses of the participants.

Table 3. Problems Encountered with Learners and Coping Strategies

Participants	Problems Encountered	Coping Strategies
Ron	Unwillingness to learn No interest Lacks communication inside the classroom Inability to speak and understand in English	Gives activities that could develop interest and engage learners to hands-on activities to develop critical thinking, ability to speak Shows good relationship with learners
Nar	Peculiar grading system; no failure policy Everyone including students with special needs should move up Class combines normal and SPED learners	Innovate and observe diligence Understand learners’ need and use resources to teach effectively
Joe	Attitudes and attitudes towards learning Language barrier Comprehension skills	Impose classroom rules and regulations Motivates students to study and learn better Let learners realize the importance of learning in their life
Tin	Naughty, talkative, and disrespectful learners Only few learners pass their assignments	Considered learners’ behavior as normal to the teaching field Understand the learners since most of them have parents who do not speak English
Net	Language barrier Books used in school are not aligned with the school curriculum	Make lesson plans on the contents of the books intended to reach the learning capacity of the learners

Table 4. Problems Encountered with Co-Teachers and Coping Strategies

Participants	Problems Encountered	Coping Strategies
Ron	Communication with Thai teachers since almost all of them cannot speak and do not understand English language	Showed good relationship with them
Nar	None	Filipino teachers are understandable in their traits, behaviors, and working ethics
Joe	Crab mentality and jealousy	Ignored them and did my work well with integrity and honesty
Tin	None	They have been accommodating, very welcoming, very kind
Net	Language barrier	None

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Table 5. Homesickness and Coping Strategies

Participants	Problems Encountered	Coping Strategies
Ron	Sadness	Communicate using internet and smart phones
Nar	Miss relatives, friends, town, city, Filipino food, alma Mater	Bond with the growing family and parents are also in Thailand
Joe	Cried because of sadness	Prayed for guidance; went to church; find new friends
Tin	None	None
Net	None	Reach out to family and friends

Table 6. Pandemic and Coping Strategies and Measures

Participants	Problems Encountered	Coping Strategies and Measures
Ron	None	None
Nar	None	None
Joe	Cancelled trip back home; missed family	Made himself feel calm, follow school’s precautionary measures
Tin	Work, health, personal business; negative effects of mass media	Obey government policies, maintain personal hygiene Continue to deliver education through online classes
Net	Financial problem	Teach using online platform; Practice good hygiene

Theme 3. Personal and Professional Growth

The Teacher Education graduates in Thailand are as important as the other migrant workers in the other parts of the globe because of their contributions to the Philippine economy. Furthermore, their role in nation-building through education of the youth in their host country cannot be disregarded. As a receiving/host country, Thailand benefitted from the Filipino teachers. Further, the skills they acquire are also given back to the Thai students. As a sending country, the Philippines receives monthly remittances thus, strengthening the purchasing power of the individuals in the micro-level. In the end, the skills and knowledge gained by the teachers will be useful in the Philippines if they choose to come home. The Filipino teachers take all the opportunities offered to them for professional development which is nearly impossible to achieve if they remain in the Philippines. Despite homesickness, depressions, inability to speak the language and other hindrances, the Teacher Education graduates in Thailand remain optimistic in their search for “greener pasture” thus finding this in Thailand as the pull factors. Though majority arrived in Thailand as tourists and became illegals according to the definition of the Philippine government of legal workers, the Filipino teachers were able to become legal in both countries by following the laws prescribed by the immigration.

According to Ron, for those who are interested to teach in Thailand, Ron said, that they have to be strong to fight sadness, be more patient when dealing with students, and be more friendly and helpful in every activity in school. Since “we are living in their country, we are the ones to adjust.”

Nar said that global competition is becoming tight so it is an edge always to be fully equipped with things learned and acquired from their studies. “As an educator we should have a greater confidence, talents, skills, patience, and God-fearing.”

Working in a faraway land enabled the TED graduates to work hard for their personal and professional growth. They have earned the trust and confidence of their superiors and fellow teachers, they have proven their worth in the teaching profession, they have good communication skills, they have sound judgment over matters, have developed patience and maturity, have found achievements in themselves for proving that they can be at par with other teachers in Thailand when it comes to knowledge, skills, abilities, and talents. Most of all, the TED graduates can blend with other culture, are God-fearing, and strong to weather the trials of their lives in a foreign country. In addition, they have saved money for themselves or for some business they intend to have, had sent money to their families in the Philippines. Another important thing the participants have found out in the years spend in Thailand is that the locales are good and friendly people with good hearts, the food are delicious, though spicy, the commodities are cheap, and there are lots of beautiful tourist destinations. Table 7 shows the responses of the participants.

Table 7. Personal and Professional Growth

Participants	Plans for Personal and Professional Growth
Ron	Continue teaching in Thailand Have personal business to have another income and for personal advancement
Nar	Have earned the trust and confidence of the colleagues Already part of the management team

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Joe	Save money and think about good business to put up in the Philippines Study master’s degree in Education
Tin	Work in factories and restaurants Give family a beautiful house and build own coffee shop
Net	Participate in a professional organization

CONCLUSIONS

This study found out that most of the TED graduates considered working as teachers in Thailand a great opportunity and a struggle. The participants are mostly BEED who graduated before 2010 and they have almost 10 years of experience as teachers assigned at the public and private schools in the neighboring towns and provinces of the Kingdom. As to job status, only two participants were on permanent status while the three were on temporary and contractual status. Four of them found the teaching job through recommendations of family and friends and only one through direct application. Their salaries are good enough for their daily needs since food are not so expensive and they can still send to their families in the Philippines.

The TED graduates have met a lot of challenges and most of them are problems with students wherein they encountered unwillingness to learn, language barrier, disrespectful and unruly attitudes. As to problems with fellow teachers, most of them encountered language barrier, professional jealousy, and language barriers. Most of them have experienced homesickness, sadness, and adjustment with the spicy

Thai food. Some of them have problems with transportation because fare is expensive. In addition, COVID 19 had caused another challenge for them which affected their work and their income including personal sideline and extra jobs, yet they preferred to go to church and follow safety protocols to ensure that they will be free of the virus. Due to the effect this pandemic caused to the education system, their respective schools and administrators gave advise on the use of online platform and observe safety measures in their classrooms and offices.

This study shows the struggles of the Filipino teachers, specifically TED graduates, to live a meaningful life in the Kingdom of Thailand. It proved that regardless of where they came from, they can blend with the locales, the culture, their fellow teachers, and students and be at par in terms of communication, skills, and talents. It further shows their resilience no matter what time or circumstances they have encountered. Most of all, they have kept their faith in God and maintain their good values and the good relationship with their fellow teachers regardless of nationality as well as the community they live in. Their struggle or “*paghimakas*” to be the best versions of themselves have paid well and they were able to find their inner strengths amidst adversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Filipino teachers, especially Teacher Education graduates of NIPSC, are expected to draw inspiration from the lived experiences of TED students teaching in the Kingdom of Thailand, to gain confidence in themselves, to apply the knowledge and skills in the real world, and to do their best in their personal and professional struggles as teachers.

TED graduates may look into their employment in other countries to share to the learners and teachers of the world the knowledge, skills, and expertise they have gained from NIPSC.

The faculty members of the Teacher Education Department of NIPSC may consider to maintain and/or improve their teaching modalities, strategies, and course content to be able to continue to produce quality graduates who could compete in the global arena, not only in Asia.

Similar studies could be conducted and include other variables not included in this study.

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