



## EXPERIENCES OF FILIPINO TEACHERS IN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL (GCC) COUNTRIES' HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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### Abstract:

This study explores the experiences of Filipino teachers working in higher education institutions within Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, focusing on the challenges they encounter and the teaching strategies they apply. In-depth interviews were done by researchers using qualitative methodologies. Criterion sampling is used to choose the participants for this study. The criteria are as follows: teachers should be teaching in a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) country; (2) they should have rendered at least 9-11 years of teaching experience to capture a wide range of perspectives in higher educational institutions in the GCC countries; and (3) Participants should be from the undergraduate programme. The researchers interviewed five participants from higher education institutions in one of the GCC countries for IDI, all of whom fell within Creswell's recommended ranges. The collected data was subjected to a thematic analysis while ethical guidelines were followed. The study results highlight that Filipino teachers in GCC higher education institutions face challenges and opportunities in adapting to the teaching and learning process. This includes the utilization of the spoon-feeding method,

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the direct teaching approach, and the application of the Socratic method. Teachers also reported dealing with minimal student engagement, having difficulty managing students, being passive students, having poor attendance, and having a language barrier. The study underscores the importance of tailored support systems to enhance the integration and effectiveness of foreign educators in GCC higher education. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the global mobility of educators and the evolving landscape of higher education in the GCC region.

**Keywords:** GCC educational system, overseas Filipino teachers, teaching and learning, challenges, student engagement

## 1. Introduction

Many teachers, regardless of their nationality and ethnicity, travel overseas for work. Teaching abroad provides teachers with incomparable career experiences and opportunities. However, these expatriate teachers face numerous challenges that affect their teaching practices. One of the challenges that affect their teaching methodology and approaches is the educational system of the host country. Consequently, they need to adjust to the curricula, teaching methodologies and institutional standards set by the country's respective Ministry of Higher Education and partner universities. It is imperative to investigate the teaching strategies utilized by overseas Filipino teachers as this is one of the teaching aspects that would meet the standard of the colleges and universities in which they are employed.

In the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries, each private higher educational institution is encouraged to have an academic affiliation with an international university. Opportunities from educational partnerships with international universities in the West are being explored by GCC countries like: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman, while other GCC countries like the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are concentrating towards inviting foreign institutions of education to establish campuses in the countries themselves (The Higher Education Review, 2022). The offshore programmes provided by private educational institutions in higher education are quality assured by international university partners and approved by the Ministry of Higher Education standard as stipulated in the agreement of both parties (Cheng and Al Shukaili, 2022). These programmes are extensively monitored by the partner international university while teaching attributes such as experience, subject certification, and the method of teaching enhance students' learning.

Higher education teachers in GCC countries utilize varied techniques based on the system of instruction prescribed by the partner international university. According to Tomlinson and Imbeau (2020), teaching strategies consist of techniques or methods utilized by teachers to increase learning and encourage engagement, which are primarily based on students' needs and styles of learning. With the emergence of technology,

lectures, a conventional method of teaching, are now replaced with technological tools that enhance and promote better teaching and learning (Saini & Al-Mamri, 2019). However, the use of these innovations in teaching poses challenges for teachers since they are expected to integrate these tools as one of their teaching strategies. Skills in how to use and operate technological tools in teaching are fundamental when integrating these tools into the teaching process (Haleem *et al.*, 2022).

Another strategy teachers utilize is active learning, which emphasizes the student's participation and engagement, resulting in a more interactive and effective learning process. Qablan (2024) argues that the use of active learning strategies constitutes several benefits to the students, and these can be a solution to the issue of incompetence of future employees in meeting the demands globally. Think-Pair-Share is an active learning strategy that encourages students to personally reflect first, discuss their reflection with another student, and finally impart both ideas to the entire class. Even though this strategy stimulates students to engage actively, it is also challenging for them since English is a foreign language to them. Consequently, participation becomes unequal in that students who can speak well dominate the discussion while those who are apprehensive will not be heard, which tends to cause teachers to shift from one approach to another. Finally, identifying the experiences of overseas Filipino teachers is valuable to have a glimpse of the challenges they encountered in teaching students from higher educational institutions in GCC countries.

## 2. Literature Review

This section presents the related literature and studies about Filipino teachers' experiences in HEIs in the GCC countries. It also provides a glimpse of the HEIs teaching and learning framework and higher education system in GCC countries. The related literature was carefully and critically selected to give a solid background to this study.

### 2.1 Teaching Strategies of Filipino Teachers Abroad

It cannot be denied that numerous Filipino teachers are exposed to different learning environments, whether in their own country or another country, and few have landed teaching jobs in other Asian countries, as pointed out by Romeo (2013). Teaching strategies play an important role in classroom instruction. Without the use of a strategy, teachers would aimlessly project information that does not connect with learners or engage them (Bouslog, 2019). It helps learners participate, connect, and add excitement to the content being delivered. As students become familiar with the various strategies teachers use, some can even apply those strategies independently as they learn new material.

There are several factors that teachers need to strategize. Some are cultural differences, learner needs, and personality variations. Many of the pupils in the classroom present a challenge to teachers in terms of how best to offer teaching.

Depending on the subject, grade level, student ability, class size, and available resources in the classroom, the teacher must implement a variety of teaching strategies. Teachers use a variety of instructional tactics to support students in meeting learning objectives and accomplishing teaching and learning goals, according to Cooper & Ozansoy (2022). In addition to this, the effect of teaching strategies is influenced by how the teacher adapts and applies the right strategy to deal with the target group and help students learn the desired course content and achieve the intended learning outcomes, as cited by Cowan (2021).

The significance of imparting efficient teaching techniques to our students within the classroom is very important. Implementing effective teaching strategies in the classroom has several benefits. According to O'Reilly, Devitt, & Hayes (2022), it encourages students to become actively engaged with the material, helps them develop critical thinking skills and fosters creativity and innovation among students, as they are encouraged to think outside of the box when approaching a certain topic or problem. This means that these techniques not only support the development of a supportive learning environment for our pupils but they also generate a sense of cooperation between educators and learners.

In addition to this, with increasing global change, schools have recently become more culturally diverse. Teachers must address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds to create an effective learning environment through personal and professional development. They need to increase their cultural awareness and develop their teaching skills to create a learning setting in which students respect each other (Serin, 2017). On the other hand, some teachers are confronted with a culture (and oftentimes a language) that they may not understand, as stated by Bassette (2018). Teachers need to adjust to potential loneliness, separation from loved ones, and adapting to a new culture simultaneously. All the cultural components that affect daily life in a new country automatically affect the educational setting of a teacher as well.

## **2.2 International Teachers**

There is a rising global demand for teachers, which essentially means more international educators are crossing borders to work in various countries. They bring diversity in perspective and experience into their host countries. However, they also face unique challenges and opportunities that impact their professional and personal lives. Many teachers seek international positions for a host of reasons, including professional development, cultural exploration, and financial incentives. According to Bunnell (2019), many teachers venture abroad to advance their professional teaching experiences by getting exposure to different educational systems. Most find strong motivation in the opportunity to be in a new culture and language setting, where he or she could find personal development as well as be able to contribute to global education (Huang, 2018).

In addition to this, according to Savva (2017), international teaching experience is often viewed as an asset in the education sector, offering teachers the chance to develop

leadership skills, learn new pedagogical approaches, and engage in professional networks on a global scale. This desire for professional growth is particularly strong among teachers who aspire to take on administrative or leadership roles in the future.

Though teaching abroad can be very rewarding, there exists a list of challenges. Part of these entails cultural adaptation, language barriers, and professional adjustment. Cultural adjustment is often said to be one of the most significant challenges one faces since it involves some teachers having to adjust to different educational practices, student behavior, and societal norms. Such linguistic complications can arise, especially in the case of teaching in a country where the native language is not a teacher's mother tongue. This could create problems while communicating with students, colleagues, and parents (Fujimoto-Adamson & Miura, 2020). In addition, professional adaptation to varied curricular and administrative expectations can cause anxiety and stress because of professional reorientation (McNulty & Carter, 2021).

International teachers can have significant impacts on the schools and pupils they serve. Their diversity can bring new practices, perspectives, and content to the learning environment, which will enrich it. Evans and Stevenson (2018) point out that international teachers frequently introduce innovative practices that turn out to be powerful levers in improving student engagement and raising standards in learning. However, the success of international teachers depends on the support that they receive from the host schools in terms of opportunities for professional development and cultural orientation programs. These teachers require support systems that will help them integrate and succeed in the host country. Effective professional development programs must, therefore, be implemented to address issues related to cultural competence, language proficiency, and local practices in education to enable international teachers to adapt to their new environment (Richardson, 2020). By and large, such social support networks will sustain teachers in the task of overcoming isolation and making their professional and personal connections in the host country.

### **2.3 Higher Education System in Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) Countries**

The GCC states had phenomenal progress in the field of education. As Ibrahim and Barnawi (2022) describe, the region has undergone large-scale, sweeping, reforms based on *“new desires for Western-inspired forms of education, internationalization, and transnational education; the new ethos of English-medium formal education policies, curricula, and classroom pedagogical practices; and a new strong desire to purchase western higher education products, goods, and services”* (Ibrahim and Barnawi, 2022).

From this early stage, each of the six GCC nations had gone through substantial social and economic alterations throughout time, like diversification supporting gender equality, their economies, and improving their educational system. Furthermore, as stated in the GCC Charter, other council's fundamental goals include deepening and bolstering connections, ties, and domains of mutual assistance existing between their peoples in different domains, creating comparable laws in many fields, including the

economy, education, finance, commerce, trade, customs, culture, tourism, legislation, administration, and health, and stimulating scientific and technological progress in the fields of industry, mining, agriculture, water, and animal resources to establish scientific research, joint ventures, and cooperation by the private sector.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the GCC states recovered, with an estimated 5.9% increase in global economic growth in 2022. Large portions of the GCC states' ongoing federal budgets are also consistently allocated to enhancing each state's educational systems. According to Alainati (2024), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations have made concerted efforts to advance educational systems, encompassing both secondary and tertiary levels, employing curriculum development, strategy diversification, quality improvement, teacher skill enhancement, and the establishment of contemporary learning environments.

Education is touted by many policymakers and developmental specialists as the primary vehicle for transformative change (Baker, [2014](#)). Thus, the GCC states continuously allocate large shares of their federal budgets to improve their respective education sectors. These efforts are driving an increase in student enrollment and educational benefits. Amin, H., Zaman, A., & Tok, E. (2023) added that countries in the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) are undergoing tremendous social and economic change in a bid to transform their societies into thriving knowledge-based economies embedded within the global system. Education is at the heart of the agenda. This has led to sweeping, mainly neo-liberal educational reforms. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and, to a lesser extent, global citizenship education (GCED) are vital parts of this shift to achieve post-carbon economies and economic diversification.

The GCC governments consistently work to raise their level of education, standing abroad, and technical innovations as part of their national aspirations. As part of their national visions, the GCC states continuously strive to improve the quality of their education, international status, and technological advancements (Mosly, 2022). Kirk (2013) concluded that education is at the heart of their agendas for economic diversification and producing a knowledge-based economy. The young demographic, high GDP per capita, and large expatriate populations have led to increased demands for high-quality education.

### **3. Material and Methods**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research design employed in this study was descriptive-phenomenological research method. In connection, based on (Crossman, 2019; Tenny *et al.*, 2022), sociological research aims to understand a particular phenomenon by interpreting the underlying meaning of the data collected through observations of human behavior, opinions, themes, events, and motivations combined with interviews and discussions as qualitative research. According to (Creswell, 2013), phenomenology, or descriptive

phenomenological research design, is a qualitative research method that emphasizes how an experience within a certain group resembles a particular phenomenon.

### **3.2 Participants and Sampling**

This study investigated Filipino teachers' experiences working in HEIs in GCC countries. The current study was conducted in one of the higher education institutions in GCC countries. The respondents consisted of 5 overseas Filipino teachers with at least 9-11 years of teaching experience to capture a wide range of perspectives in higher educational institutions in the GCC countries. Participants were taken from the undergraduate programmes.

For non-probability sampling, a combination of purposive sampling and availability sampling was employed to select the participants. Purposive sampling focuses on a particular characteristic of a population that is of interest or related to the study, which will best enable the researchers to answer the specific research questions (Laerd Dissertation, 2012). On the other hand, availability or convenience sampling is where participants are selected for the sample simply because they are the most accessible to the researcher (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

### **3.3 Ethical Consideration**

This is to ensure that this research has adhered to the ethical consideration guidelines, that the conduct of this research is anchored on the appropriate protocol, and that no participant's rights or data obtained may have offended someone. The participants were requested to read and sign the consent letter before taking part in the study. This was intended to ensure the participants' willingness to participate in the study. Likewise, it was also done to inform the participants of their protections and rights during the study. Also, the researchers assured that the participants and their answers were kept private, and if they were not comfortable with the question, they had the privilege of not answering them.

### **3.4 Role of the Researchers**

The researchers are the key players responsible for the successful conduct of this study. The researchers served as the organizer, analyst, editor, proofreader, and transcriber, whose functions were crucial in the conception and execution of this study. The discussion of Fink (2000) on the seven roles of the researchers was used in this study. The researchers chose to split the research process into seven stages: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting.

As the organizers, the researchers were responsible for sourcing participants for the study. They organized one-on-one in-depth interviews and provided the venue. They also acted as the interviewer, inquiring pertinent questions to gather the data required to answer the specific study topic.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The researchers chose the qualitative phenomenology research design applied in the study to discover the experiences of Filipino teachers working in the HEIs of GCC countries; it was carried out through the conduct of in-depth interviews (IDI) involving the participants of the study to elaborate and gain a deeper understanding of the topic. The interview revolved around the questions related to the experiences of Filipino teachers working in the HEIs of GCC countries.

Before the execution of the actual gathering of data, the researchers first formulated probing interview questions. These interview research questions with corresponding questions served as a tool to discover the experiences of Filipino teachers working in the HEIs of GCC countries. Furthermore, the terminologies in the questions were taken from a reliable source.

To acquire the best answers from the research participants, the researchers employed one-on-one in-depth interviews to supplement the findings that they had gathered from the study. The qualitative research method is called a one-on-one interview to perform in-depth interviews with a limited number of participants (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). Furthermore, with the utilizations of one-on-one interviews, the researcher explored the different perspectives of their participants corresponding to the different open-ended questions that were provided by the researchers. In this way, the researchers were able to get the exact responses that were needed in the study. The entirety of the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

In this study, the method that the researchers used was thematic analysis (TA). Thematic analysis is a method for studying qualitative data that involves searching through a data set to identify, analyze, and report recurring patterns, according to Braun and Clarke (2006). Additionally, thematic analysis is a suitable method of analysis when attempting to comprehend experiences, thoughts, or behaviors present across a data set. The six-step process outlined in the most generally used framework for thematic analysis includes familiarizing yourself with the data, establishing initial codes, searching for themes, analyzing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Using thematic analysis, the researchers became familiar with the data by reading the main points of their research. It allowed the researchers to carefully analyze their work and correct any mistakes. The next phase is coding, which entails classifying the text to create a framework for thematic ideas. At this step, the researchers define, look at, and check that the TA is associated with the patterns found throughout their data sets (Kigere & Varpio, 2020).

### **3.7 Rigor of the Study**

Most qualitative research studies contain factual and accurate information about the topic involved. In the making of the study, the researchers ensured the study was thorough by



providing valid evidence from reliable sources. To achieve a successful research paper, the researchers paid attention to the trustworthiness of the study to address the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research.

### **3.7.1 Credibility**

As defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is confidence in the “truth” of the findings. The credibility of the study is a very important factor in conducting a trustworthy study. Before the interview, the researchers conducted a re-check to verify the teachers' information using other sources. The researchers made sure to inform the participants of the study that their answers were recorded to observe credibility. The transcribed copy was read to the participants, who were also given copies for them to check and read so that the proper and authentic transcription was observed all the time. Likewise, the participants also assured that the information collected was valid and relevant to the study.

### **3.7.2 Transferability**

Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is the showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts. The researchers of the study allow future researchers to use the data and the information about the study that was collected to be a basis for their research if ever they have the same or related to this study as emphasized study's significance. With this, the researchers made sure to recheck the gathered data and information to verify the result of the study. Moreover, the researchers made sure that the language utilized in the formulation of interview questions and during the interview was properly understood by the participants. This ensured that the participants understood the question correctly and expressed their ideas accurately.

### **3.7.3 Dependability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) show that the findings of the study are consistent and could be repeated. The study's dependability was observed by the researchers by thoroughly examining the information given by the participants to emphasize the validity of the study. The researchers provide an informative explanation as to how the stakeholders would benefit from this study. From this study, the researchers see how the teachers, educational institutions, and future researchers will benefit from this by gaining information on how relevant this issue is in today's generation, as well as in the country's context.

### **3.7.4 Confirmability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability is the degree of objectivity or the extent to which study participants' opinions, rather than the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest, influenced the study's conclusions. The researchers used the conformability of the study in the aspect of interviewing the participants neutrally so that the

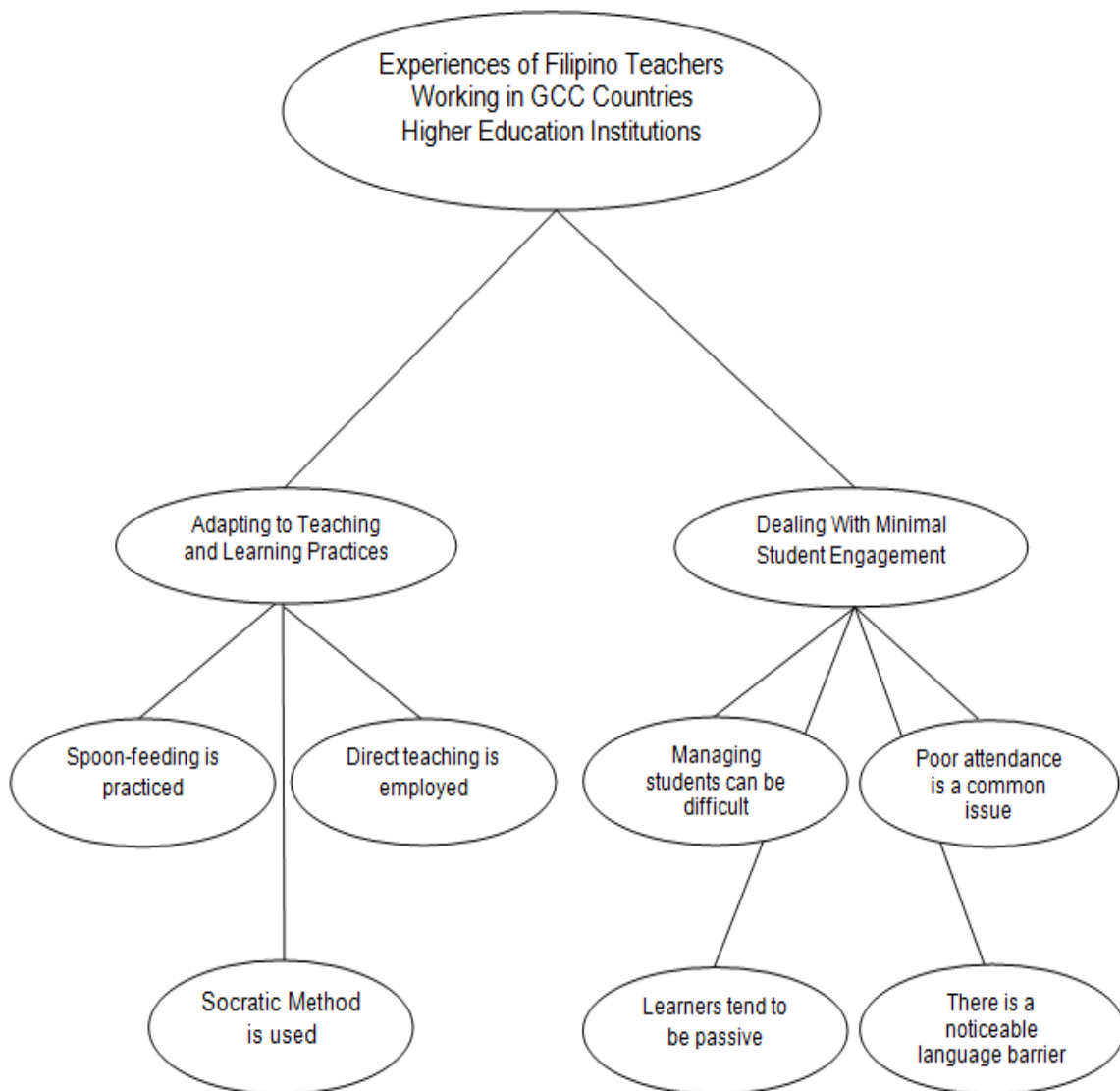
participants did not feel as if their answers were being manipulated and they would feel comfortable answering the questions provided by the researchers. Likewise, the study adopted an audit trail in which the researchers made research notes, having the research decision and activities show the transparency of the study and have it confirmed and authenticated using other studies.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the result of the data analysis is presented. Discussions are also provided to give a comprehensive explanation of the themes.

##### 4.1 Experiences of Filipino Teachers Working in GCC Countries

Figure 1: Experiences of Filipino Teachers Working in Gulf Cooperation Council Countries



In reality, educators are exposed to different learning environments, whether in their own country or another country. They often encounter a range of experiences, both positive and challenging. Diokno *et al.* (2020) stated that working in a foreign setting requires an individual to become adaptive in navigating an unfamiliar environment and diverse culture; individuals try to fit in with the host culture and adjust him/herself accordingly to maintain a suitable relationship and achieve social interaction. Despite all the challenges that Filipino Educators have faced and will face, these challenges are perceived as a way for them to easily adapt to their new surroundings. Based on the data gathered, it is prevailing that despite the challenges they experienced, they were able to adopt teaching strategies, as shown in Figure 1.

#### **4.1.1 Adapting to Teaching and Learning Practices**

Teaching children from different cultural backgrounds presents both unique opportunities and challenges for educators. To be effective, teachers must adapt their strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. Teachers must ensure to carefully know the background of each student to fully address the various needs of every student. Based on the analyzed data, spoon-feeding is one of the teaching strategies used by some of the participants in this study.

##### **4.1.1.1 Spoon-feeding is Practiced**

The first teaching strategy that the teachers utilized in GCC Countries is the feeding method. Due to students' difficulty in adapting to the lessons, teachers are using spoon-feeding method.

*"We have to exert more effort so that they will also be motivated to study because I believe the Arab learners have this less extent in terms of learning, their commitment to learn is really a challenge for us teachers here." (P1, L33-35)*

*"The more adjustment should be done to these Arab students because as I've said they are our challenging clients for the services, they are what we call, you have to please them because this is their country." (P1, L65-67)*

This statement from the respondents also aligned with the statement of Barberos, M. T., Gozalo, A., & Padayogyog, E. (2018) that teachers must come into possession of adequate knowledge of the objectives and standards of the curriculum, skills in teaching, interests, appreciation and ideals. They also added that teachers need to exert effort to lead children or students into a life that is large, full, stimulating, and satisfying. Some students seem naturally enthusiastic about learning, but many need or expect their instructors or teachers to inspire, challenge or stimulate them.

*“So, therefore, most probably we are talking about using the lecture method or strategy. Not purely lecture but it’s like a form of lecturette. So, when we say lecturette, meaning small lecture followed by the guided-learning activity.” (P4, L13-16)*

*“Here in ahh...in a foreign country...teaching wise, it is really a struggle on the part of the teacher. It is because...you will have ahh...you will have to employ like ahh...you have to spend much talking time.” (P4, L35-37)*

Teachers need to explain concepts, provide instructions, and clarify any misunderstandings. This requires a fair amount of talking to ensure that students understand the material. According to Nifli (2021), there should be careful planning in addressing the needs of the learners inside the classroom based on their level and specific needs, as well as on the lesson stage and what we want to achieve.

*“What I mean is that...when you are used to teach in a very active learning environment, once you come here in the Gulf countries, you will be...you know frustrated on the...what you call those outcomes...of the learners. It is because your...you will be...I mean, you will deliver the lecture, you will ask them questions and you will also answer your own question. That is why that the bottom line is there will be like a 99.9% teacher talking time.” (P4, L80-85)*

Talking is an essential part of teaching; effective teachers may balance their talk time with opportunities for student interaction and independent work. The feedback given by the teacher is in the form of a direct response from the teacher to provide correcting formation to students (Aisah & Hidayat, 2020). In addition, repetition is also a form of teacher talk that is often used to determine whether the learner understands what the teacher is talking about (Zhang, 2020).

#### **4.1.1.2 Direct Teaching is Employed**

For teachers, direct teaching aims to present the lesson's objectives and engage students from the outset. It is effective for teaching specific skills or knowledge when the teacher's role is to provide clear and direct explanations and support. For teachers working in GCC Countries, direct teaching is their way of delivering their lessons, especially since some of the students cannot absorb the lessons easily. Based on the data gathered, some of the teachers working in GCC countries employed direct teaching, especially in introducing new topics.

*“Here you must have to introduce first the topic and then questioning will be at the end of your introductory of that information.” (P1, L 17-18)*

*"They are always silent, and the class is like the teacher is always the model teacher, the teacher is always the actor in the classroom so they will just be there coming in and then listening to you and then these students are shall we say not all can adopt what you impose or I mean what you discuss to them on the spot, you need to repeat them, you need to reinforce something that they have to have a deep understanding of the subject matter."* (P1, R57-61)

*"Because in the deductive, it is teacher-centred right? You are presenting new content to the students, and somehow you have to start providing those topics to the students and along the way, you have to give examples like that, and then after you provided examples just to test whether the students did or did not understand so you have to give some specific activities like seat works or problem-solving to their practice then at the end you have to ask them how are they going to summarize about what they have learned."* (P2, L5-14)

Renard L., 2023, also supports this statement by the respondents that direct instruction is one of the most effective teaching strategies. Although often misunderstood, students who are taught using the direct instruction method perform better in reading, math, and spelling than those who are not. It is an effective teaching approach that can be used by teachers to provide students with specific information and skills. It has many advantages, such as its use of structure, the fact that it can be used to teach complex concepts and its ability to promote student engagement Shahid Lakha (2024).

*"One of the strategies that I am employing as a foreign teacher is that we have this we call presentation method. Ahh..., it like we are using our PowerPoint slides to yeah deliver our lecture. After that, because you know our students when we have these slides to be presented in front of them, ahh...we can catch their interests unless if you will just...if you will just lecture...lecturing them without ahh...showing any visual aids so that will be difficult for them."* (P4, L40-43)

*"So, another strategy is that we are having what we call...independ...ahh we call this...guided-learning activity just to measure the amount of learning get by the students after we deliver the presentation as a lecturette. That is in the form of a like a formative assessment to find out whether the learning outcomes for the day is met."* (P4, L46-47)

*"At the same time, apart from that ahh...we also have some sort of a like ahh...what you call this...independent learning activity wherein we require our students to have some sort of homework and with that, they are allowed...I mean...they have the chance to ahh...access the...what do you call this...online library where the college is affiliated."* (P4, L55)

This teaching strategy helps teachers in GCC countries deliver their lessons. It helps to enhance the learning experience. The teacher gives more details and ensures that each student understands the idea clearly through the use of PowerPoint presentations. It also allows students to remember things better. By seeing things in front of them, students can recall the information quickly. Studies show that digital technologies can have positive effects on student learning in higher education because they encourage student engagement in constructive and interactive as opposed to passive and active learning activities (Wekerle, C., Daumiller, M., & Kollar, I., 2022).

#### **4.1.1.3 Socratic Method is Used**

Based on the responses of the respondents, they also employed strategies that correspond to the unique needs of the students. They have used the Socratic Method, which allows students to engage in class discussions because of the way the teachers ask questions and the ability to engage students. According to their response:

*“Let see for example ang studyante ay interested sa topic so mag e engage sila, so magkakaroon tayong class engagement. Para maging successful ang classroom engagement dapat alam nila kung ano talaga ang gustong mangyare sa klase. (Let see for example the student is interested in the topic so they will engage, so there will be class engagement. For classroom engagement to be successful, they must know what they really want to do in class). (IP3, R13-16)*

*“The Socratic strategy is asking open questions. This asking open questions is also the strategy that I am using here because I want to get an answer to my students and I want them to answer. and after that they answer I have a follow-up question so that I will find out if the students really understand.” (P5, L27-31)*

This strategy helps the teachers working in GCC to aid the learners' ways of adapting the lessons. Teachers adopt this strategy to stimulate critical thinking and uncover underlying beliefs through questioning. Through the uniqueness of the students' level when it comes to class participation, teachers find this strategy effective. According to (Makhene, 2019), this strategy has been used in various levels of education ranging from primary to higher education. It also covers multidisciplinary educational settings such as political science, science and nursing education.

#### **4.1.2 Dealing with Minimal Student Engagement**

It cannot be denied that numerous Filipino teachers are exposed to different learning environments, whether in their own country or another country, and few have landed teaching jobs in other Asian countries, as pointed out by Romeo (2013). One of the major challenges Filipino teachers face in GCC educational institutions is minimal student engagement, which affects the learning environment and overall academic progress.

Based on the analysed data, the difficulties in fostering active student participation are being highlighted.

#### **4.1.2.1 Managing Students Can Be Difficult**

Filipino teachers in GCC countries often encounter difficulties managing their classrooms. The difficulty in managing students stems from diverse classroom dynamics and varying levels of student motivation.

*"They are difficult to manage because of their culture, to them they are relying on the teacher if they do not understand, if they fail, they are blaming the teachers." (P2, L69-72)*

*"When it comes to managing, foreign students are more difficult because English is hard for them." (P5, L85-87)*

This response from the participants also matched the statement of Serin (2017), who said that teachers must address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds to create an effective learning environment through personal and professional development. They need to increase their cultural awareness and develop their teaching skills to create a learning setting in which students respect each other. This difficulty is compounded by students' varying levels of interest and engagement. Teachers report that creating a conducive learning environment requires significant effort, as traditional management strategies may not always be effective. This challenge is exacerbated by differing educational backgrounds and expectations.

#### **4.1.2.2 Poor Attendance Is a Common Issue**

Poor student attendance is a prevalent issue for Filipino teachers in GCC HEIs. Absenteeism disrupts the learning process and negatively impacts student achievement. Studies have shown that absenteeism is linked to poorer educational outcomes (Gottfried, 2014).

*"In the Arab setting, usually there are students who commit absences that exceed the required number of attendances. So, it is an issue because we, as teachers, not only the teachers but also their advisers, will keep on sending them messages. (P1, L81-83)*

*They lack consciousness when it comes to attendance. They are not particular when it comes to punctuality, too." (P5, L52-53)*

*"Since they are not focused, they never mind if they are coming to class late. That is their attitude." (P2, L59-60)*

In GCC countries, cultural and religious practices sometimes justify absences, but this challenges teachers accustomed to a more structured schedule. Teachers must often revise lessons to accommodate absent students, adding to their workload and disrupting classroom continuity (Chaudhury *et al.*, 2006). Teachers observe that irregular attendance impacts individual learning outcomes and overall class cohesion. The inconsistency in student presence disrupts the flow of lessons and complicates efforts to maintain engagement and continuity in the educational process. This problem is often linked to external factors such as familial responsibilities or socio-economic conditions affecting students' ability to attend regularly.

#### **4.1.2.3 Learners Tend to Be Passive**

A common observation is that learners in GCC countries tend to be passive in classroom settings. Filipino teachers noted that students are less likely to engage in or initiate discussions actively. This passivity may stem from cultural norms where students are expected to show deference to teachers, limiting their classroom participation (Al-Harthi, 2014).

*“More of our students here are passive in teaching-learning process. They are just sitting down in their chair; they will be silent all throughout the lecture. Students are not participating. So, therefore, teaching-wise, there is really a struggle on the part of a foreign teacher. It is because students are not very participative.”* (P4, L31-35)

*“You will lead them, you will push them, because if not, your class is typically a boring class. They are very passive.”* (P1, L73-74)

Unlike the more participative approach often seen in the Philippines, students in the GCC may hesitate to express their opinions or ask questions, which can hinder deeper learning (Díaz-Rico, 2018). This passivity can stem from a traditional educational background where rote learning is emphasized over critical thinking and engagement.

*“To give you a specific description of the students here, you can see that they are not focused. they are not focused because to them education is not much important.”* (P2, L54-56)

*“Some of them lack interest, they only want their diploma. They are not for learning; they go for diploma and promotion.”* (P5, L87-88)

*“For students who is very passive and shy, you need to come up with a question that will engage them, and you should also gauge whether the question you give will effectively encourage them to open up.”* (P3, L21-23)



Teachers find that fostering active participation requires innovative teaching methods and sustained motivational efforts. They are tasked with finding innovative ways to encourage active participation and foster a more interactive learning environment. Strategies such as inquiry-based learning and collaborative projects can help shift students from passive recipients of knowledge to active participants. According to O'Reilly, Devitt, & Hayes (2022), it encourages students to become actively engaged with the material, helps them develop critical thinking skills and fosters creativity and innovation among students, as they are encouraged to think outside of the box when approaching a certain topic or problem. This means that these techniques not only support the development of a supportive learning environment for our pupils but they also generate a sense of cooperation between educators and learners.

#### **4.1.2.4 There Is a Noticeable Language Barrier**

The language barrier also plays a significant role in the lack of student engagement. Language barriers significantly affect the teaching experience for Filipino educators in GCC countries. Many students may struggle with English proficiency, which hampers communication and learning. Gándara & Contreras (2009) also support the idea that language barriers limit effective instruction and can create misunderstandings, reducing student comprehension.

*"It's a different thing, because their native tongue is not really a fluent English speaker. Because of language barrier, there is what we call a discrepancy in terms of knowledge acuity." (P1, L29-31)*

*"It is a struggle for teaching if you don't have this what we call guts how to get the attention of the students. Language barrier is really a problem here." (P2, L84-85)*

*"Their participation and language barrier can be challenging. Their vocabulary might be limited since English isn't their first language. For example, if you change your terms or phrasing, they might become confused or disengaged." (P3, L49-52)*

English, or the teacher's language of instruction, is a second or third language for many students, making it difficult for them to grasp lessons or express themselves confidently and fully. This challenge hinders meaningful interaction between teachers and students, further discouraging participation. Filipino teachers note that many students struggle with English or other instructional languages used in GCC educational institutions. This barrier hampers students' comprehension and ability to engage with the curriculum fully.

*“So, basically, what I am employing when I am teaching the EFL learners, for example, we cannot impose what we call a communicative approach. It’s because our students have problems or difficulty when it comes to language as a language barrier.” (P4, L11-13)*

*“What I did is just to talk to them slowly and ask some students who know to speak English to translate for them. Because if you will not ask some students to translate, they will just look at you to see if they understand. In order for the connection to be there, I really must ask students to translate so that we will understand each other.” (P5, L101-105)*

The effect of teaching strategies is influenced by how the teacher adapts and applies the right strategy to deal with the target group and help students learn the desired course content and achieve the intended learning outcomes, as cited by Cowan (2021). Teachers often need to adapt their communication strategies, use supplementary materials, and provide additional support to bridge the language gap and enhance student understanding and participation.

#### **4.2 Discussions**

The findings revealed that Filipino teachers working in the higher education institutions of the GCC countries utilized spoon-feeding, direct teaching and Socratic methods to meet the student’s level and needs. The Filipino teachers used the spoon-feeding method to ensure that learning would take place on the part of the students. The participants believed that this methodology caught students’ attention and led them to understand the lesson clearly. On the other hand, teachers need to exert more effort to ensure that students understand and learn the lessons, which makes teaching for them too tiring, tedious and energy-consuming. They had no option but to resolve the issue of a much longer talking time since the majority of the students encountered difficulty in adopting and understanding the lessons. This implies that students consider their teachers as the main source of knowledge and skills. It is through their teachers’ discussions and support that they learn and understand the lessons. The involvement of the teachers when they discuss lessons makes students think that they are helped while they are learning (Ayllón *et al.*, 2019), and this gives them a feeling of competence. According to Arab (2023), this results in the deprivation of students’ ability to experience learning on their own. Its long-term effects are a lack of problem-solving skills and the inability to accomplish tasks on their own since they are used to the teacher performing the tasks on their behalf.

In terms of direct teaching and the Socratic method, Filipino teachers employed both methods in the teaching and learning process to guarantee understanding when providing students with specific information and skills as new lessons are introduced. In direct teaching, the teacher introduces the topic, expounds and provides examples to ensure understanding by utilizing PowerPoint presentations. Guided learning activities, seatwork or problem-solving exercises are then given as formative assessments to gauge learning and to know if the learning outcomes of the lesson are achieved. It can be

affirmed that students can apply what they learned during the class session through guided learning activities and practice the acquired knowledge through independent learning tasks. Assigning students with a variety of activities, such as mathematical computations to apply to problem-solve after a controlled discussion, makes direct teaching effective. Ashman (2021) claims that direct teaching is a short and straightforward route to ensure effective teaching in the classroom. Socratic method, on the other hand, for the participants, engages students in class discussions to stimulate their critical thinking skills and encourages students to share their ideas and opinions. When teachers ask questions, they encourage students to participate and, at the same time, measure the students' understanding of the topic discussed. The study of Dalim *et al.* (2022) revealed that teachers are on the side of the Socratic method because it promotes and enhances the critical thinking ability of the students, which is also aligned with the participants' purpose of using this method in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, teachers must tailor their method and way of teaching according to the level and needs of the students in the HEIs in GCC countries.

Filipino teachers working in the HEIs of GCC countries face several challenges in dealing with minimal student engagement in aspects like managing students, poor attendance, passive attitude of students and second language as a barrier. Firstly, the participants expressed clearly that the students are difficult to manage because of their extreme dependency on the teacher to the extent that they are blamed whenever students cannot comprehend the lessons or fail the module. Secondly, poor attendance of the students is another challenging part of teaching in the HEIs of GCC countries. Participants claimed that students were either absent or late, which disturbed not only the lesson flow and focus of the teachers but also the learning process. Thirdly, the passive attitude of the students has contributed to the level of engagement coming from the students themselves. Teachers are struggling because the majority of the students tend to be passive rather than engaging in the class despite the extra effort given by the teachers to encourage their students to participate actively. Thus, teachers are challenged to employ innovative strategies and techniques to foster and encourage participative behaviour from the students. Lastly, the language barrier is also challenging the teachers working in the HEIs of GCC countries. Teachers identified clearly that it is an issue for their students because it greatly affects their ability to understand, comprehend and acquire knowledge. However, for teachers to cope with language barrier issues, they speak slowly and request other students whose English language level is better to translate it to their first language for the majority of the students to understand and enable them to participate in the discussion. These challenges faced by Filipino teachers in higher education institutions in GCC countries can be attributed to insufficient preparation and encouragement coming from the basic and secondary education of the students (Cohen-Azaria and Zamir, 2021), for it is a contributing factor to being passive and inactive in class. Furthermore, English, used as a medium of instruction in the HEIs of the GCC countries, is challenging to most Arabic-speaking students since achieving

proficiency in the second language promotes academic achievement (Alsaifi and Shin, 2019) and because there is a language barrier problem in the part of the students, the passive and poor attendance attitudes are associated to the minimal engagement in class. However, Hsu and Huang (2017) suggested that confirmation from the teacher improves student's ability to comprehend learning materials, how they perceive learning and participation in class. Therefore, the negative behavior of the students in terms of learning can still be addressed by the teachers from a different angle but in a challenging process.

## **5. Recommendations**

To foreign Filipino teachers, it is highly recommended to attend rigid training in handling diverse students abroad to enhance the teaching-learning experience, integrate more student-centered approaches like project-based learning and collaborative group work to encourage active participation and reduce reliance on spoon-feeding, develop strategies that improve attendance and engagement, such as flexible scheduling, interactive lessons, and incentives for participation. And in addressing the identified challenges. Future efforts should also focus on fostering active learning environments. To the Ministry of Education in GCC countries, it is highly recommended that they provide foreign teachers with the support to combat the challenges they are facing by providing rigid training in handling diverse students abroad to enhance the teaching-learning experience and by implementing targeted language support programs to bridge communication gaps, ensuring all students can fully engage with the curriculum. Further studies on the experiences of Filipino teachers abroad, not only in GCC countries but also in other parts of the world, can be conducted to provide wider insights into this matter. The Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines could also take part in a wider scale of the study to have a better understanding and to provide more opportunities for Filipino teachers vying for teaching abroad.

## **6. Conclusion**

The experiences of Filipino teachers in GCC countries' higher educational institutions manifest themselves in adapting to teaching and learning practices and dealing with minimal student engagement. In a foreign teaching environment, Filipino teachers have to adapt their teaching practices. The predominant use of spoon-feeding and direct teaching methods indicated a reliance on traditional instructional approaches, which may hinder student engagement and critical thinking. At the same time, the incorporation of the Socratic method shows an effort to promote dialogue and inquiry. However, these teaching strategies were compromised by issues such as poor attendance and passive learning behaviours. Additionally, the presence of a language barrier further complicates communication and understanding, contributing to the difficulties in managing students of different nationalities.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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