

NAVIGATING CROSS-CULTURAL TERRAIN OF CHRISTIAN FILIPINO TEACHERS IN A BUDDHIST CONTEXT

Kierwin Paulo
Virgilio Kim

Graduate School, FEU Roosevelt, Cainta, Rizal, Philippines

Corresponding author's email: kierwinpaulo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study investigated the lived experiences of Christian Filipino teachers working in predominantly Buddhist international school settings. Semi-structured interviews with eight licensed Filipino Christian educators were analyzed using thematic analysis. Four major themes emerged from the data: (1) Environmental adaptations (adjusting to new living and teaching conditions), (2) Faith and cultural dissonance (balancing Christian identity in a Buddhist context), (3) Spiritual and social support (coping via faith and community), and (4) Professional fulfillment and adaptation (evolving teaching styles and satisfaction). The findings highlight communication and cultural gaps, as well as the importance of institutional orientation, emotional support systems, and faith-based resilience in facilitating cross-cultural adjustment. Based on these results, we propose structured orientation programs and peer-support networks to better prepare and sustain such educators abroad. Keywords: cross-cultural adaptation, Christian Filipino teachers, Buddhist context, phenomenology, qualitative research. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Christian Filipino teachers working in a Buddhist country, specifically Thailand. The purpose of this study was to understand the difficulties encountered by these teachers and the coping strategies they employed while working in a culturally and religiously different environment. The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to capture the participants' personal experiences and perspectives. Eight licensed Filipino Christian teachers currently employed in international school in Thailand were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings revealed four major challenges experienced by the participants: (1) communication gaps due to language barriers and cultural differences, (2) physical and mental fatigue caused by workload demands and environmental adjustment, (3) religious conflict arising from differences between Christian beliefs and Buddhist practices, and (4) emotional stress, including homesickness and cultural isolation. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience through four primary coping strategies: (1) showing respect for the host country's religion and culture, (2) establishing social support networks with fellow Filipinos and colleagues, (3) relying on personal faith, prayer, and spiritual practices, and (4) maintaining strong

connections with family in the Philippines. The study highlights the importance of cultural competence, emotional support systems, and spiritual resilience in helping teachers adapt successfully in cross-cultural environments. The findings may benefit educators, school administrators, and policymakers in developing support systems for international teachers working in multicultural and religiously diverse settings.

Keywords: *lived experiences, Filipino Christian teachers, Buddhist country, cross-cultural teaching, phenomenology, coping strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

This study provided an overview of the study, including its background, significance, and objectives. It established the foundation of the research by discussing the problem statement, research question, and the rationale behind of the study. Additionally, it outlined the study's scope, limitation, significance, and definition of terms. Highlighting its potential contributions to the field.

Working in abroad was a huge sacrifice. OFWs left the comfort of their homes to venture to the unknown of other country where he or she faced many difficulties. Separated with their loved ones and families, OFWs confronts numerous challenges and changes. The globalization of education has led to an growingly diverse landscape within classrooms and academic institutions worldwide. Among the multitude of educators contributing to this global education system are Filipino teachers, a significant number of whom are Christians. This research focuses on a specific subset of this demographic - Christian Filipino teachers - who have chosen to chase their teaching careers in countries where Buddhism is the main religion. The Philippines, our beloved country, known for its strong Christian influence, has been a abundant source of skilled educators who venture beyond their homeland to impart knowledge and contribute to the development of educational systems abroad. This migration of teachers has created a captivating intersection of cultures and religions, particularly when these educators find themselves working in countries where Buddhism is the dominant faith. The rationale for examining the experiences of Christian Filipino teachers in Buddhist countries stems from the need to comprehend the distinctive challenges and opportunities they encounter in their professional and personal lives. As cultural and religious diversity in educational settings becomes increasingly significant, there was a growing urgency to examine the dynamics that unfold when teachers from a predominantly Christian background immerse themselves in Buddhist educational contexts. This research sought to go above and beyond the surface-level examination of cultural differences and aims to uncover the lived experiences of Christian Filipino teachers. It explored the intricacies of their cultural adaptation, the challenges they face in the context of religious diversity, and the impact of these experiences on their professional identities. By delving into these aspects, the study aim to contribute to the broader conversation on cross-cultural education and to provide valuable insights for educators, educational institutions, and policymakers. Understanding the lived experiences of Christian Filipino teachers in Buddhist countries was not only academically relevant but also holds practical implications for promote inclusive and supportive educational environments. As teachers navigate the intersections of culture, religion, and professional identity, this research endeavors to provide a nuanced understanding that can inform strategies for better cross-cultural integration, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of global education systems.

Despite the wealth of literature on international teacher migration and cross-cultural adaptation, there were notable gaps that warrant attention. This critically examined the existing literature, identifying areas where the experiences of Christian Filipino teachers working in Buddhist countries have been under-explored (Collins, 2008; Hawthorne, 2015; Shrestha, 2013). Recognizing these gaps was essential for justifying the need for the current research study and highlighting avenues for further scholarly inquiry. While existing literature addressed the broader context of international teacher migration (Berry, 1997; Goh, 2012), there was a notable gap in the exploration of religious diversity within this phenomenon. Specifically, the experiences of Christian Filipino teachers, a religious minority in Buddhist countries, have received limited attention. This gap hindered a comprehensive understanding of how religious identity intersects with the broader challenges and opportunities faced by international educators. The majority of literature on international teacher migration tended to generalized experiences across different host countries and religious contexts (Benson & Nunan, 2002; Holliday, 2010). There was a distinct gap in the literature concerning the specific challenges, cultural adaptations, and unique dynamics faced by Christian Filipino teachers in Buddhist educational settings. Addressing this gap was crucial for providing context-specific insights into the lived experiences of educators in these environments.

Intersectionality, considering the interconnected nature of various social identities, was often overlooked in existing literature on cross-cultural teaching. This gap limited our understanding of how intersecting factors such as religion, gender, and ethnicity influenced the experiences of educators (Crenshaw, 1991). The current literature fails to explore the nuanced ways in which Christian Filipino teachers navigate multiple dimensions of identity in Buddhist countries.

Theoretical frameworks, such as Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model (Kim, 2001), are widely used in the study of cross-cultural experiences. However, there was a dearth of literature applying these frameworks specifically to the experiences of religious minorities, such as Christian Filipino teachers. This gap inhibited a nuanced understanding of the psychological and sociocultural processes at play in their adaptation. While literature on global education and cross-cultural teaching existed, there was a notable underrepresentation of Buddhist educational contexts in this body of research (Thurman, 2006; Watson & Hay, 2018). This gap hampered the development of a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and religious dynamics specific to these settings. It also limits the applicability of existing knowledge to the unique challenges faced by Christian Filipino teachers in Buddhist countries. The literature on institutional support for educators often lacked a specific focus on the needs and experiences of religious minorities. Christian Filipino teachers, as members of a religious minority, may require unique forms of support (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Zajda, Daun, & Saha, 2008). The existing gap in understanding how institutions addressed the religious and cultural needs of educators hinders the development of inclusive policies and practices.

Background of the Study

Many people said that working as a teacher is a noble profession. Working as a teacher in the Philippines is difficult but rewarding. However, working as a teacher in a different country is more difficult because working in a different country means having a cultural barrier, a language barrier, a different form of government, and some religious belief that can be contrasting to yours. In this research we sought the lived experiences of a “Christian” Filipino teachers, their challenges or struggles in working

to a buddhist country, and how they cope up with these challenges. The researcher is currently working in an international school in the capital of Thailand, Bangkok. The researcher has a background in theology thus he chose this topic that interest him the most. He saw that there were so few research papers that dwell in this topic and would like to add contribution to the body of knowledge. Ramkhamhaeng Advent International School is accredited by the Western Association of School and Colleges (WASC) and recognized by the Ministry of Education in Thailand. The school is located in Ramkhamhaeng, Bang Kapi District, Thailand. The school has approximately 100 teachers both local (Thai) and international. The Filipino teachers in this entire school is more than 50 percent of the entire population. There are also different nationalities like American, Chinese, Indonesian, African, Russian, European, and more. The school has one thousand plus (1000+) students from kindergarten to secondary. The students here are from very wealthy families and have big companies and businesses. OFW or Overseas Filipino Worker are estimated at 1.83 million working abroad and around the world (PSA, 2023). In 2021 there are 17,920 OFW in Thailand. Most of the OFW in Thailand are teachers, they are teaching in government schools, international schools, private and bilingual schools, tutorial centers, and universities. Most in demands are English Teachers followed by Science, Math, Social Studies, Music and Arts, and PE. There is a limited number of christian churches in Thailand. The reason is the majority of religion in Thailand is buddhism, around 85 to 90 percent are Theravada Buddhist and 5 to 10 percent are muslims. Others are christians, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs (State.gov 2021).

Theory

A theoretical framework helped in understanding the underlying concepts and theories that related to the problem being investigated. Here was a key theory that could serve as a theoretical framework for this study:

Social Identity Theory (SIT), proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), examines the ways in which individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, deriving a sense of identity and self-esteem from these group affiliations. In the context of Christian Filipino teachers working in a Buddhist country, SIT will be employed to explore how their religious and cultural identities influence their interactions with colleagues and students. By understanding the role of social identity in their experiences, this theory will contribute to uncovering the dynamics of intergroup relations and potential challenges related to religious and cultural differences.

Key Components of Social Identity Theory:

Social Categorization:

- Everyone categorize themselves and others based on shared characteristics, such as religion, ethnicity, nationality, or profession. In the context of Christian Filipino teachers in a Buddhist country, religious and cultural affiliations play a important role in social categorization.

Social Identity:

- Each persons derive a sense of belonging and self-worth from their group memberships. In the case of Christian Filipino teachers, their identity as Christians and Filipinos influences their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors within the cultural and religious context of the Buddhist country.

Social Comparison:

- Every person compare their own group favorably with other groups, contributing to the development of in-group favoritism. This aspect becomes crucial

when exploring how Christian Filipino teachers perceive and interact with colleagues and students from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Positive Distinctiveness:

- Group members strive for positive distinctiveness, seeking to enhance the perceived superiority of their in-group over out-groups. Understanding how Christian Filipino teachers navigate the balance between keeping their cultural and religious identity while honoring the diversity of the Buddhist context is essential.

While Social Identity Theory provides a strong framework for understanding in-group and out-group dynamics, it remains limited in capturing the fluid and context-dependent nature of identity in transnational settings. In this study, the identities of Christian Filipino teachers are shaped not only by social categorization but also by religious belief, cultural interaction, and professional roles. Similarly, acculturation theory and intercultural competence models explain cross-cultural adaptation as a balance between integration and identity preservation. However, these models do not fully address the tension between faith-based identity and institutional expectations within a dominant cultural system. Furthermore, existing literature reveals a gap in understanding how religious identity intersects with pedagogy and institutional dynamics in Buddhist educational contexts. This highlights the need for research that integrates lived experience, identity negotiation, and culturally responsive teaching practices.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrated the key aspects influencing the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and support systems of Christian Filipino educators teaching in a Buddhist educational context. This framework identified the relationships between these factors and how they shape the professional and personal lives of the teachers.

Experiences of Christian Filipino Educators in a Buddhist Context

This referred to the real-life interactions, encounters, and adjustments that Christian Filipino educators undergo while working in Buddhist institutions. Their experiences were positive, challenging, or transformative, depending on various factors such as cultural differences, religious expectations, teaching methodologies, and institutional policies. Understanding these experiences helped identify common patterns and areas of struggle or success, which can inform solutions for better cross-cultural integration.

Challenges of Christian Filipino Educators in a Buddhist Context

This focused on the difficulties and obstacles that Christian Filipino teachers face while teaching in Buddhist context. These challenges arose from cultural, religious, professional, and social differences that may create conflict or tension in their roles as educators. Identifying these challenges allowed for the development of effective coping strategies and support systems to help teachers thrive in these environments.

Coping Mechanisms of Christian Filipino Educators in a Buddhist Context

This highlighted the strategies and adjustments that Christian Filipino teachers use to manage stress, resolve conflicts, and adapt to the Buddhist educational environment. These coping mechanisms were psychological, spiritual, social, or

professional in nature. Understanding these coping mechanisms helped future educators prepare for similar experiences and provided insights into how schools can better support their diverse teaching staff.

Intervention Program for Christian Filipino Educators in a Buddhist Context

This referred to the proposed strategies, programs, or policies that were implemented to support Christian Filipino teachers in Buddhist schools. These interventions aimed to reduce cultural and religious conflicts, enhance teacher well-being, and improve the overall teaching experience. Intervention programs provided practical solutions to ensure that Christian Filipino educators were effectively integrated into Buddhist institutions without compromising their faith, values, or teaching effectiveness.

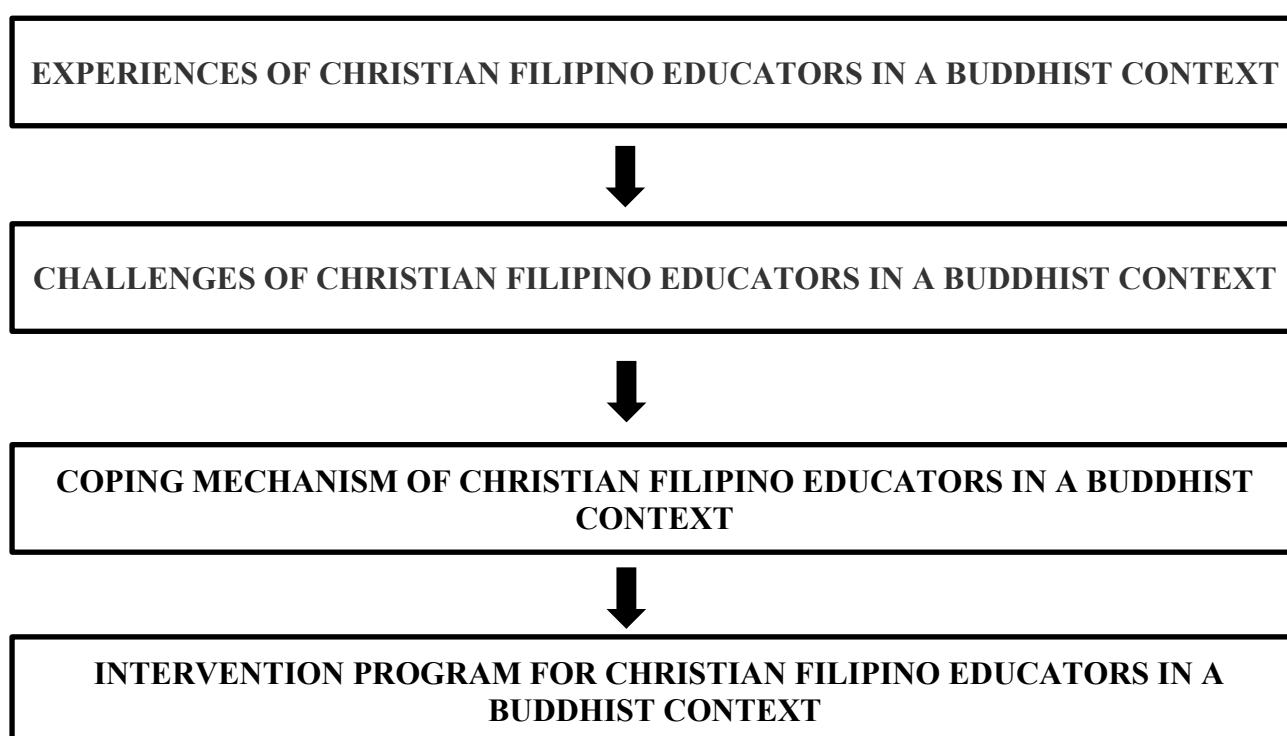


Figure 1: Philosophical Underpinning

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Christian Filipino Teachers working in a buddhist country, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Christian Filipino Teachers working in a Buddhist country in terms:
 - 1.1 Physical
 - 1.2 Mental
 - 1.3 Social

2. What are the challenges encountered by Christian Filipino teachers working in a Buddhist country?
3. What are the coping strategies utilized by the Christian Filipino teachers working in a Buddhist country?
4. What intervention program can be proposed based on the findings of the study?

Scope and Delimitation

The study examined the lived experiences of Christian Filipino teachers in Ramkhamhaeng Advent International School, Thailand, Academic Year 2023-2024. It determined the challenges and coping strategies of the Christian Filipino teachers in a Buddhist country.

The researcher's role was to consider the divergent messages of significance that appeared in the in-person interviews, and identify common themes and issues. This unconditionally positions this research in concurrence with individual contributions of Christian Filipino teachers in a Buddhist country.

The study was only limited to the minimum requirement of eight (8) Christian (Adventist) Filipino teachers who teach for at least 3 years in Ramkhamhaeng Advent International School, Thailand. The study was limited to the data that was gathered using a validated semi-structured interview designed by the researcher. It was also limited to all the information that was provided by the participants, Christian Filipino teachers in Thailand.

Delimitations were positioned on this study by the quantity of interviewees, the focus of the study, and the time obtainable with each interviewee. Each attempt was made to guarantee the accuracy of transcriptions and the intent of the participants' comments. However, in this qualitative study, the findings may perhaps be subject to other interpretations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research used qualitative design. Qualitative research was referred to as naturalistic research because the researcher enters the world of the participants to gather information on the research topic (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1978). Qualitative research investigated the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials (Frankel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). This was also an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative inquiries focus on participants' perceptions, experiences and on the process that was occurring as well as the outcome. Thus, this design was more effective in featuring the lived experiences of Christian Filipino teachers in Buddhist country. Qualitative research was used to identify phenomena and focus on subjective experiences and understanding the structure of those lived experiences. It was founded in the early 20th century by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and started as philosophy. Qualitative design was used to describe, in-depth, the common characteristics of the phenomena that have occurred.

In a qualitative research design, the reality was conditioned by society and people's intentions were involved in explaining cause-effect relationships. Things were studied in their natural setting, enough for you to conclude that qualitative

research was an act of inquiry or investigation of real– life events. (Silverman 2013, Litchman 2013; Walliman 2014; Suter 2012). As qualitative research were used for a thorough understanding of human experiences, the present study lends such design to present a clearer view of perception given the fact the subject of its investigation was also educators of their personal experiences. The use of Amedeo Giorgi's descriptive phenomenology is appropriate for this study as it focuses on capturing participants 'lived experiences, consistent with Edmund Husserl's emphasis on understanding consciousness as directly experienced. However, some potential incongruence arises in the difficulty of fully achieving bracketing, particularly given the researcher's background, which may influence interpretation. Additionally, while Giorgi's approach prioritizes pure description, the analysis of complex themes such as religion and identity may involve a degree of interpretation. Despite these challenges, the method remains aligned with Husserlian principles by centering participants ' narratives and aiming to uncover the essence of their lived experiences while minimizing researcher bias. The study ensured methodological rigor through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was established through triangulation of interviews and thematic consistency. Dependability was ensured through a systematic application of thematic analysis, creating a clear audit trail. Confirmability was strengthened through expert validation of themes, while transferability was achieved through detailed descriptions of participants and context.

Research Locale

Ramkhamhaeng Advent International School is located at 1 Soi Ramkhamhaeng 119, Sukhapibal 3, Huamark Bangkokpi Bangkok 10240 Thailand.

Ramkhamhaeng Advent International School (RAIS) is a privately-owned Christian school serving students from nursery to Grade 12 in the greater Bangkok area. It is operated by the G.J. Education Company Ltd.

The Founder of RAIS, is a Seventh-day Adventist. In 1998, one morning during his customary devotion, he was urged by an inner voice to set up a school that will help to plant the seeds of God's love in the hearts of students. At first, he was not enchanted by the bidding of this voice of God since Education endeavors were not within the realm of his business which was to manufacture speakers for sound system; however, the voice persisted, and he yielded to the heavenly vision, and converted his business complex into a school. Today, together with his family, which owns RAIS, he stands as a shining example of what God can accomplish through the life of a dedicated Christian.

In August 1999, RAIS came into existence under the name, Ramkhamhaeng Adventist International School (a minor alteration was made in the school's name in 2005). In the first school year, RAIS enrolled sixty-nine students, and has experienced a consistent growth in enrollment in each subsequent year since the school's inception. Most recent enrollment figures show the total number of students reaching nearly seven hundred in grades K-12 and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) without counting the feeding programs.

He established RAIS with a solid basis in Adventist Christian Principles following the Seventh-day Adventist holistic model of education which emphasizes mental, physical, social, spiritual growth and development. RAIS students are recognized as unique God-created individuals. In that light, teachers and administrators endeavor to equip students to reach their full, God-given potentials and talents in every aspect of life.

RAIS is founded on the premise that God is the Creator of all life and the Source of all knowledge. For that reason, academics at RAIS place a large emphasis on the centrality of the Christian Scriptures and the wisdom that comes from God so the school's motto states, "They shall all be taught of God."

In addition to stressing academic achievement, RAIS curriculum places an equal importance on character development. Students are taught and encouraged to demonstrate respect for diverse cultures and people both in words and in deeds. The academics at RAIS revolve around scholastic learning and moral maturation.

Participants

There were eight (8) informants who were purposefully selected at Ramkhamhaeng Advent International School from elementary school to high school department. These individuals have been interviewed separately and provided firsthand experience and insights into their lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. They were filipinos, licensed professional teachers, identified as christians, and with a minimum of 3 years working experienced in a buddhist country or Thailand.

The participants were Christian (Adventist) filipino teachers who were currently working for at least 3 years in Ramkhamhaeng Advent International School, Thailand. These participants were from different grade levels, from kindergarten to elementary and secondary. Seven participants were selected during this study, with adventist christian backgrounds.

Purposive sampling was a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involved identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) note the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. The use of purposive sampling ensured the selection of information-rich participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon. In phenomenological research, depth is prioritized over quantity. The sample size was sufficient as thematic saturation was reached, indicated by recurring patterns and no emergence of new themes in later data.

In this qualitative study, the researcher attempted to seek information from Christian filipino teacher who are currently working in a buddhist nation. The purpose of using purposive sampling design was to make critical evaluation of the case being studied. The Ramkhamhaeng Advent International School have approximately a thousand faculty and staff in all grade levels. As recommended for this phenomenological study eight participants were chosen as the basis of research.

In phenomenological research, saturation is not defined by quantity but by theoretical completeness of meaning structures. Using Giorgi's method, each transcript was analyzed for meaning units, transformed into psychological expressions, and clustered into themes.

Saturation was evidenced by:

- Repetition of core experiential meanings across participants
- No emergence of new structural categories in later interviews
- Stabilization of themes across physical, mental, and social domains

Thus, "stopping point" was not arbitrary but determined by the redundancy of experiential meaning, indicating that the phenomenon had been sufficiently disclosed.

Data Gathering

Once the consent form has been given and granted permission by the respective informants to be interviewed, the researcher proceeded to the actual field of data gathering/collecting through one on one interviews through Facebook, messenger, and/or Skype, recorded with note-taking procedure, and face to face.

To make the data gathering procedure smoothly conducted the intention of the researcher towards personal interviewing the participants must be sincerely done and make them set their minds to be natural in expressing whatever experience they may share. To start with, the participants may be asking first a brief overview of their background as an educator; how many years they had been teaching; their principle or saying as a teacher, what subjects they have handled for the past years to set the mood of the participants. Afterward, the conversation may now move to the actual questions reflected in the interview guide thus the researcher simultaneously do note-taking to keep valuable information given from the participants recorded in the actual interview phase. With the consent and permission given from the participants, all interviews were electronically recorded through MacBook laptop. The researcher was positive to have the personal interview with the valuable participants of the locale of the study.

Data Analysis

The researcher manipulated the data gathered by qualitative approaches: incredibly diverse, complex, and nuanced (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and thematic analysis was a foundational method for qualitative analysis. It was the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provided core skills that were useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Indeed, Holloway and Todres (2013) identify “thematizing meanings” as one of a few shared generic skills across the qualitative analysis. For this reason, Boyatzis (1998) characterized it not as a specific method but as a tool to use across different ways. Similarly, Ryan and Bernard (2000) located thematic coding as a process performed within major analytic traditions (such as grounded theory), rather than a specific approach in its own right. We argue thematic analysis should be considered a method in its own right.

The Thematic analysis was a method of analyzing qualitative data based on a personal point of view, opinion, knowledge, and experiences. To evaluate the data gathered from the set of instruments to be used, the researcher used thematic analysis of data to improve the credibility and validity of the data collected towards the research findings. This approach entailed the relativeness of the theories and studies applied in connection with the study to make it more relevant and believable. Some subtopics about teaching reading such as learning vocabulary and grammar can also be part of the method by which the study reflected or evaluated the concept of ideas being investigated. The researcher transcribed and analyzed the data through the use of thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke, (2006). The following are the phases of thematic analysis.

1. Familiarize yourself with your data.
2. Assign preliminary codes to your data in order to describe the content.
3. Search for patterns or themes in your codes across the different interviews.
4. Review themes.
5. Define and name themes.
6. Produce your report.

After going through with the process, sub-themes and major themes emerged from the data gathered from the participants. As a means of assuring the correctness of the sub-themes and themes, the researcher consulted an expert to further investigate and check the validity of themes and recommendations and suggestions of the experts were followed.

Ethical Considerations

The authors declare that the ethical standards of research were strictly followed and that there was no conflict of interest in the conduct of this study. Informed consent was given to every participants. Confidentiality of identity of the participants were protected through the used of codes in all documentation. Respect for cultural sensitivity was observed. Privacy and protection of personal information were handled with utmost care.

RESULTS

The study's essential component, the research questions, was discussed according to the sequence presented in the introduction. The framework and analysis surrounding the qualitative meanings, codes, sub-themes, and themes discovered throughout the research process are described. It answers the statement of the problem through the presentation of findings. The latter was generated by analyzing and interpreting data collected from the study participants. The meaning units and codes of the transcript supported the emerging themes. Each participant was indicated using alphanumeric characters I1 to I8. A complete copy of the transcript was attached to the appendices.

The demographic information of the eight participants is presented in Table 1. The eight interviewees are all Filipino teachers of a school in Thailand.

Table 1. The demographic information of the eight (8) informants

Informant	Gender	Age	Civil Status	Years of Teaching In RAIS	Subject being taught
I1	Male	27	Single	3	English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Mathematics
I2	Female	32	Married	4	EFL and Values Education
I3	Female	40	Married	14	Science
I4	Male	45	Married	12	Values Education
I5	Male	28	Married	5	Music
I6	Male	28	Married	6	Music

17	Male	34	Married	6	Religious Studies
18	Male	42	Married	8	Biology

The themes presented in this section were derived from a systematic analysis of participants' narratives using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Rather than merely categorizing responses, the themes represent recurring patterns of meaning that capture the shared lived experiences of the participants. The researcher followed a strict process to find themes in each conversation, which made sure that the results were true and logical. The steps taken were in line with the framework for theme analysis that Braun and Clarke laid out in 2006. The following steps were taken:

1. Getting to Know the Data: The researcher read each report carefully to get to know the data and start to understand it.
2. Initial Coding: The researcher gave the data initial codes by hand, marking important pieces of information that were relevant to the study questions.
3. Finding Patterns and Codes: Once the data set had been coded for the first time, patterns were found that led to the codes being put into useful groups.
4. Generating Themes: The codes and groups were looked over to come up with broad themes that showed what the sources' main experiences and problems were.
5. The themes that were found were looked at again and made better to make sure they were consistent and still relevant. Any themes that overlapped or weren't clear were either combined or taken out to make things clearer.
6. Defining and Naming Themes: Each theme was made clear, and a short statement was written to capture the spirit of the data it reflected.
7. Report Construction: The finished report was made, which included a list of the themes, how they related to each other, and quotes from the data to back them up.
8. An outside theme expert checked the themes and sub-themes to make sure the results were accurate. This step helped make sure that the themes that were found were based on the data correctly and weren't affected by study bias.

Table 2: Themes Generated from the Raw Data

Aspect	Experiences	Challenges	Coping Strategies
Physical	Theme 1: Environmental Adjustments Theme 2: Workloads	Theme 1: Communication Gaps Theme 2: Fatigue	Theme 1: Respect for religion Theme 2: Social support network

Mental	Theme 1: Cultural Adaptation Theme 2: Christian vs. Buddhist Faith Theme 3: Teaching Styles	Theme 3: Religious Conflict	Theme 3: Relying on faith and daily prayer
Emotional	Theme 1: Homesickness Theme 2: Support from Christian fellowship Theme 3: Personal fulfillment	Theme 4: Emotional Stress	Theme 4: Maintaining connections with family

The themes presented in Table 2 illustrate that participants' experiences are multi-dimensional, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional aspects. However, these dimensions are not independent. Instead, they interact and influence one another in shaping the overall lived experience. For instance, physical challenges such as workload and environmental adjustments contribute to mental stress, which in turn affects emotional well-being and social interaction. This interconnectedness suggests that adaptation occurs holistically rather than in isolated aspects of experience.

Table 2 shows the themes generated from the raw data, from the three major objectives of the study such as knowing experiences, describing the challenges and determining the coping strategies.

Experiences of Filipino Christian teachers were categorized in four aspects such physical, mental and emotional. In the physical aspect, the emerging themes were Theme 1: Environmental Adjustments; Theme 2: Workloads. In the mental aspect: Theme 1: Cultural Adaptation and Theme 2: Christian vs. Buddhist Faith. In the emotional aspect, Theme 1: Homesickness; Theme 2: Support from Christian fellowship; Theme 3: Personal fulfillment and Theme 4: Teaching Styles.

Challenges of Filipino Christian teachers include Theme 1: Communication Gaps; Theme 2: Fatigue; Theme 3: Religious Conflict and Theme 4: Emotional Stress.

Coping Strategies employed by the Filipino Christian teachers include Theme 1: Respect for religion; Theme 2: Social support network; Theme 3: Relying on faith and daily prayer and Theme 4: Maintaining connections with family.

There were three distinct aspects of themes that emerged from the research data on "experiences". The aspects were physical, mental and emotional. The physical and mental aspects has two generated themes while the emotional aspect have four themes.

1. Experiences

The figure below shows the themes in the experiences of the respondents.

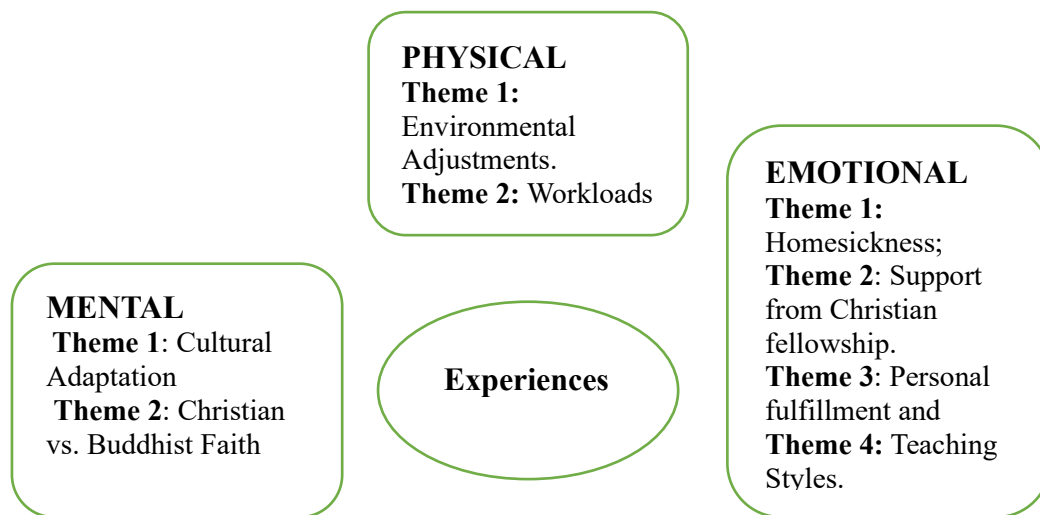


Figure 2: A Visual Presentation of the Themes in the Experiences in Different Aspects

Figure 2 shows a categorized breakdown of various experiences into three main aspects: Physical, Mental, and Emotional. Each aspect is associated with specific themes that emerged from the experiences. Physical Experiences are divided into two themes:

Theme 1: Environmental Adjustments – highlighting the challenges faced in adapting to a new physical environment.

Theme 2: Workloads – reflecting the pressure and demands associated with academic or professional responsibilities.

Mental Experiences encompass Theme 1: Cultural Adaptation – addressing the mental adjustment needed to navigate a different culture and Theme 2: Christian vs. Buddhist Faith – indicating the cognitive and ideological challenges stemming from religious differences.

Emotional Experiences are the most detailed, comprising four distinct themes: Theme 1: Homesickness – representing the emotional toll of being away from home and loved ones; Theme 2: Support from Christian Fellowship – pointing to the emotional support derived from shared religious community; Theme 3: Personal Fulfillment – covering feelings of achievement and purpose and Theme 4: Teaching Styles – reflecting emotional responses to varying pedagogical approaches.

Under the main idea of Experiences, all of these things are linked and show how personal and professional adaptation in a cross-cultural or new setting is multifaceted. These findings indicate that the participants' experiences are not limited to isolated categories but are interconnected dimensions of a broader process of adaptation. The physical, mental, and emotional aspects collectively reflect how teachers adjust to new cultural and religious environments while maintaining their professional roles. This supports the idea that lived experience is dynamic and shaped by continuous interaction between the individual and their environment.

There were three distinct aspects of themes that emerged from the research data on “challenges”. The aspects were physical, mental and emotional. The physical aspect has two generated themes while the mental and emotional aspects have each one theme.

Filipino Christian teachers working in a predominantly Buddhist country encounter unique and multifaceted challenges shaped by cultural, professional, and religious differences. Based on the lived experiences of the participants in this study, four primary themes emerged: Communication Gaps, Fatigue, Religious Conflict, and Emotional Stress. These themes reflect the day-to-day realities of navigating unfamiliar social contexts, demanding work environments, and the internal tension of maintaining personal faith in a religiously different setting.

Communication Gaps highlight the language barriers and cultural misunderstandings that hinder meaningful interaction with students, colleagues, and the broader school community. Fatigue captures the physical and mental exhaustion brought about by high workloads, extended teaching hours, and the expectations of academic excellence. Religious Conflict arises from the tension between the teachers' Christian beliefs and the predominantly Buddhist practices in their host country, often resulting in feelings of exclusion or a struggle for spiritual expression. Finally, Emotional Stress refers to the psychological strain experienced due to homesickness, professional isolation, and the emotional burden of cross-cultural adaptation.

2. Challenges

The figure below shows the challenges of the respondents.

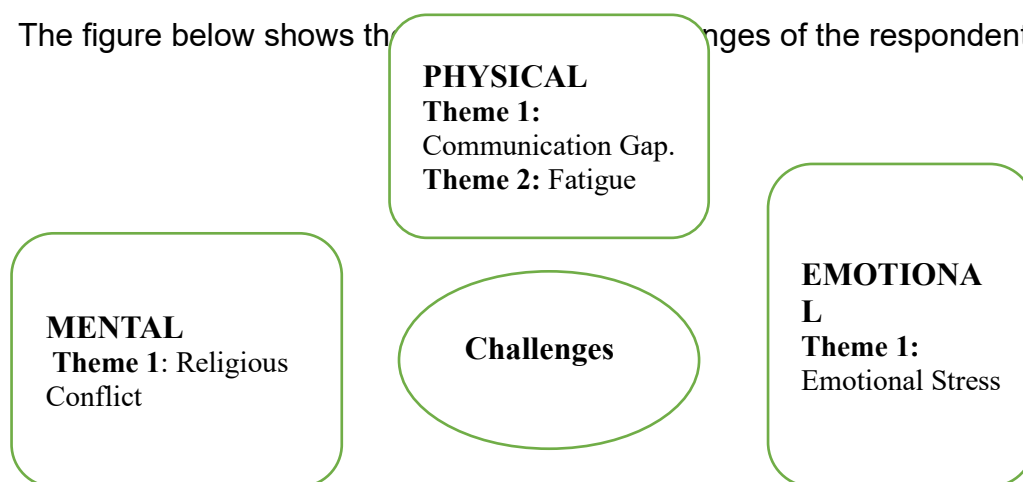


Figure 3: A Visual Presentation of the Themes in the Challenges in Different Aspects

Figure 3 shows a categorized breakdown of various challenges into three main aspects: Physical, Mental, and Emotional. Each aspect is associated with specific themes that emerged from the challenges. Physical Challenges are divided into two themes:

Theme 1: Communication Gap – highlight the language barriers and cultural misunderstandings that hinder meaningful interaction with students, colleagues, and the broader school community.

Theme 2: Fatigue – captures the physical and mental exhaustion brought about by high workloads, extended teaching hours, and the expectations of academic excellence.

Mental Experiences encompass Theme 1: Religious Conflict – arises from the tension between the teachers' Christian beliefs and the predominantly Buddhist practices in their host country, often resulting in feelings of exclusion or a struggle for spiritual expression.

Emotional Experiences is comprising Theme 1: Emotional Stress – refers to the psychological strain experienced due to homesickness, professional isolation, and the emotional burden of cross-cultural adaptation.

Under the main idea of Challenges, all of these things are linked and show how personal and professional adaptation in a cross-cultural or new setting is multifaceted.

3. Coping Strategies

The figure below shows the themes in the coping strategies of the respondents.

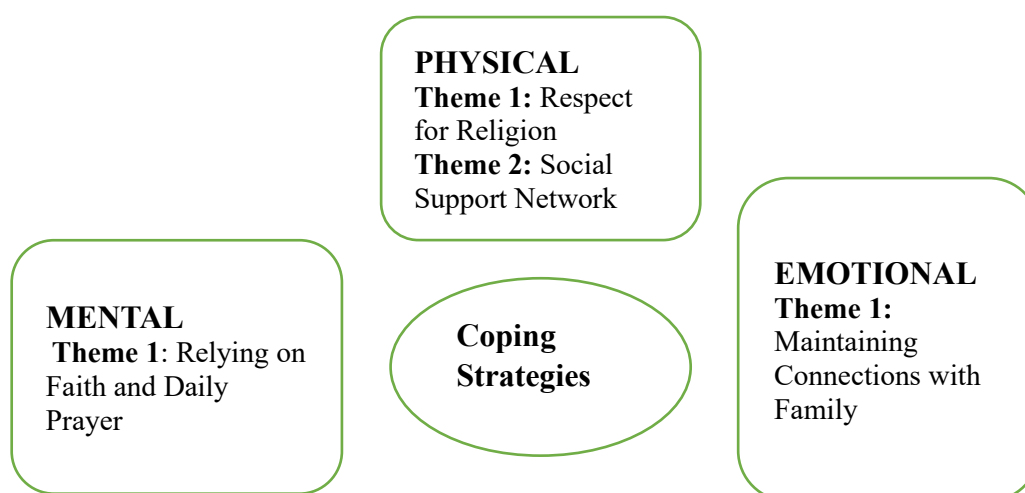


Figure 4 presents a categorized overview of the coping strategies employed by Christian

Filipino teachers working in a Buddhist context, organized into three primary dimensions: Physical, Mental, and Emotional. Each dimension is associated with specific themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. Physical Coping Strategies include:

Theme 1: Respect for Local Religion – highlighting the conscious efforts to show cultural sensitivity and respect toward Buddhist practices to foster harmony and reduce conflict.

Theme 2: Social Support Network – focusing on building connections with fellow Filipino teachers, expatriates, and local colleagues to create a sense of community and shared understanding.

Mental Coping Strategies comprise: Theme 1: Relying on Faith and Daily Prayer – illustrating the reliance on spiritual practices to maintain mental resilience, peace, and purpose despite cultural and professional challenges.

Emotional Coping Strategies are the most nuanced, consisting of: Theme 1: Maintaining Connections with Family – representing the critical role of regular communication with loved ones to mitigate homesickness and emotional strain.

Together, these coping strategies demonstrate the holistic and dynamic ways in which Christian Filipino teachers navigate the complexities of living and teaching in

a culturally and religiously different environment. They reveal an intricate balance of respecting external cultural norms while nurturing internal sources of strength grounded in faith, community, and self-care. This comprehensive framework underscored the interrelated nature of physical, mental, and emotional adaptation in fostering resilience and well-being in cross-cultural professional settings.

DISCUSSION

The central essence of the lived experiences of Christian Filipino teachers in a Buddhist context lies in the continuous process of cross-cultural and religious adaptation while maintaining personal and professional identity. Across participants, common patterns emerged, including cultural adjustment, negotiation of religious differences, and the need to balance personal beliefs with professional responsibilities. These shared experiences reflect a dynamic process in which teachers actively adapt to their environment while sustaining their sense of identity. This essence highlights that their experiences are not isolated events but structured patterns shaped by the interaction of cultural, social, and institutional factors.

This study is entitled, *Navigating Cross-Cultural Terrain Of Christian Filipino Teachers In A Buddhist Context*. Primarily, it aims to investigate the phenomenon of Christian Filipino teachers working in a predominantly Buddhist educational context, focusing on the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual challenges they encounter, as well as the coping strategies they employ in navigating cross-cultural and interfaith dynamics.

This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of Christian Filipino teachers working in a Buddhist country, specifically Thailand. Through qualitative methods—primarily in-depth interviews with eight informants—the research unearthed deeply personal narratives that highlighted the multifaceted nature of their experiences. The findings are summarized in alignment with the study's Statement of the Problem (SOP)

Three research questions guided the study:

1. What are the lived experiences of Christian Filipino Teachers working in a Buddhist country?

Teachers experienced considerable physical demands associated with adjusting to Thailand's hot and humid climate, participating in school-related activities, and standing for extended teaching hours. The lack of familiar food and access to home-country healthcare services also contributed to physical discomfort. These adjustments resulted in fatigue, exhaustion, and occasional health issues.

The mental aspect of their lived experience was largely shaped by the pressure to adapt to a new culture while preserving their identity as Christian educators. Participants described a sense of cognitive strain as they learned to navigate cultural differences, school expectations, and communication barriers. The challenge of aligning personal beliefs with the prevailing religious customs of the host country contributed to internal conflict and mental stress.

Emotional challenges were strongly felt and often centered around homesickness, loneliness, and a lack of community, particularly during religious holidays and personal milestones. Despite their passion for teaching, participants reported feelings of sadness, emotional exhaustion, and a longing for familiar Christian traditions. However, many also experienced fulfillment and joy from their work and

interactions with students, which provided emotional rewards and spiritual encouragement.

2. What are the challenges faced by Christian Filipino teachers working in a Buddhist country?

Language and cultural barriers made it difficult for teachers to communicate effectively with students, parents, and school administrators. These gaps led to misunderstandings, professional frustration, and reduced confidence, especially in instructional delivery and classroom management.

Teachers experienced physical and mental fatigue stemming from environmental adjustment, high workload, and demanding school activities. The strain was often exacerbated by extracurricular duties and administrative responsibilities, leading to burnout in some cases.

Teachers encountered ideological tension when expected to participate in Buddhist ceremonies or observe customs that conflicted with their Christian beliefs. They had to find respectful yet assertive ways to navigate such situations without compromising their faith.

Separation from family, lack of local Christian support, and cultural isolation contributed to emotional distress. These feelings were particularly intense during holidays or major life events when the absence of familiar spiritual and social rituals was deeply felt.

3. What are the coping strategies utilized by Christian Filipino teachers working in a Buddhist country?

Rather than withdrawing, teachers made deliberate efforts to understand and respect Buddhist customs. They practiced cultural sensitivity while maintaining personal boundaries, thereby fostering workplace harmony without compromising their convictions.

Teachers formed close bonds with fellow Filipino educators, local expats, and Christian groups. These social circles provided emotional, spiritual, and practical support, becoming essential for their mental and emotional resilience.

Daily prayer, devotionals, online worship services, and Bible reading were crucial spiritual routines. Teachers reported that these practices anchored them during challenging times and renewed their sense of mission and hope.

Maintaining open and regular communication with family in the Philippines helped reduce emotional strain. These connections reinforced a sense of purpose and gave teachers comfort and motivation to continue their work abroad.

Conclusions

From the summary of findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Christian Filipino teachers experience diverse physical, mental, and emotional challenges while working in a Buddhist country. They adapt to new climates, workloads, cultural practices, and differing faith contexts. Despite these difficulties, they find personal fulfillment, spiritual growth, and professional resilience through cultural adaptation and faith-based support.

2. The study revealed that the challenges faced by Christian Filipino teachers include communication gaps, fatigue, religious conflicts, and emotional stress. These issues hinder their professional performance and affect their overall well-being,

particularly in navigating cultural differences and balancing their faith with institutional expectations.

3. Christian Filipino teachers cope with the demands of teaching in a Buddhist context by respecting the host country's religion, nurturing social support networks, relying on their Christian faith and daily prayer, and maintaining strong connections with family. These strategies provide them with strength, stability, and encouragement to continue their mission as educators abroad.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Educational institutions should provide structured orientation programs to support cross-cultural adaptation, while Filipino teachers are encouraged to actively engage in reflective practices, professional development, and fellowship groups to enhance resilience in their physical, mental, and emotional journeys.

2. School administrators should establish professional development opportunities focusing on intercultural communication, workload management, and interfaith sensitivity. Policies should be designed to create an inclusive and supportive educational environment where teachers' cultural and religious identities are respected and acknowledged.

3. Christian Filipino teachers should be encouraged to sustain their coping strategies through active participation in church activities, family communication, and peer support groups. Likewise, schools and local organizations should collaborate with churches and communities to strengthen these support systems and to provide safe spaces for cultural and spiritual expression.

REFERENCES

- Al-Hassan, S. (2013). Religion and professional identity among educators.
- Alismail, H. A. (2016). Multicultural education: Teachers' perceptions and preparation. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(11), 139–146.
- Ashikuzzaman, M. (2023). Cross-cultural communication in education: Challenges and strategies. *International Journal of Educational Research*.
- Ballesteros, M. (2016). Multigrade teaching in the Philippines: Issues and practices.
- Benson, P., & Nunan, D. (2002). *Learners' stories: Difference and diversity in language learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 5–34.
- Boundas, C. V. (2005). The role of belief in shaping professional identity.
- Chan Dy, M. (2022). Humanistic Buddhism in the Philippines: Development and adaptation.
- Collins, F. (2008). International teacher migration: Trends and issues.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- De Guzman, A. B., & Kim, S. (2011). Filipino teachers in South Korea: Experiences and challenges.
- Dilworth, M. E. (1998). Being responsive to cultural differences: How teachers learn.

- Earley, P. C., & Ang, S. (2020). *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures*. Stanford University Press.
- Frankel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2012). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Goh, C. (2012). *Teaching in multicultural environments: A global perspective*.
- Hawthorne, L. (2015). *Skilled migration and teacher mobility*.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Holliday, A. (2010). *Intercultural communication and ideology*. Sage Publications.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Sage Publications.
- Locke, L. F., Spirduso, W. W., & Silverman, S. J. (1978). *Proposals that work: A guide for planning dissertations and grant proposals*. Sage Publications.
- Magsino, R., & Santiago, R. (2017). *Filipino teachers in the United States: A study of adaptation*.
- Shrestha, P. (2013). *International teachers and cultural adjustment*.
- Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2022). *A review of acculturation experiences*.
- Springer, S. (2019). *Cross-cultural media didactics in education*.
- Suter, W. N. (2012). *Introduction to educational research: A critical thinking approach*. Sage Publications.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- Thurman, R. (2006). *Buddhist education and cultural context*.
- Tsai, Y., & Chuang, S. (2018). *Work values and job satisfaction in Buddhist societies*.
- UNESCO. (2019). *Global education monitoring report*.
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Watson, J., & Hay, D. (2018). *Religion and education in diverse contexts*.
- Zajda, J., Daun, H., & Saha, L. J. (2008). *Globalization, education, and policy research*. Springer.