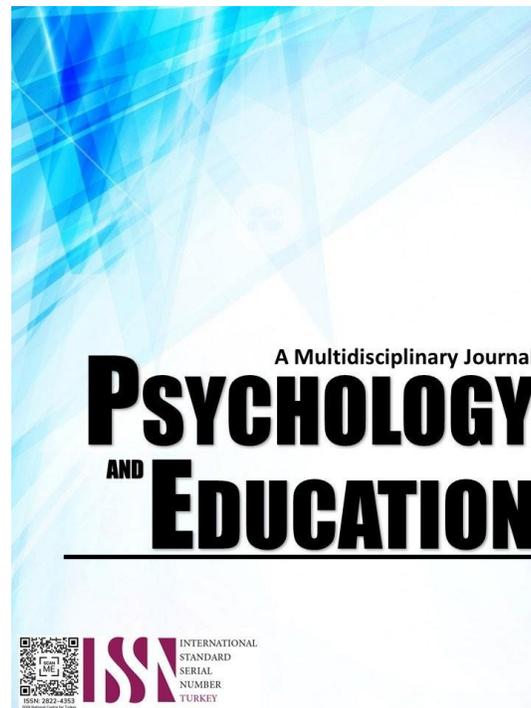


NAVIGATING STRESS: SELF-CARE AND MENTAL WELL-BEING AMONG FILIPINO TEACHERS IN THE U.S.



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Navigating Stress: Self-Care and Mental Well-Being among Filipino Teachers in the U.S.

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Abstract

Teacher well-being is a pressing concern, particularly for migrant educators such as Filipino teachers in the United States, who face challenges related to cultural adaptation, professional demands, and social isolation. This study employed a phenomenological research design, semi-structured interviews with 10 Filipino teachers in Massachusetts to investigate their self-care practices and mental well-being. Findings indicated that cultural values, particularly familialism and spirituality, significantly influenced self-care choices, with participants frequently engaging in family-oriented activities and religious practices. Nonetheless, professional pressures, including heavy workloads and institutional biases, intensified stress levels and hindered regular self-care routines. Community support, primarily accessed through Filipino cultural networks, emerged as a crucial coping strategy, offering emotional comfort and social reinforcement. This research underscores the significance of culturally responsive interventions, including peer mentorship programs and adaptable wellness initiatives, in addressing identified barriers and promoting teacher well-being. Integrating cultural identity into support structures within educational institutions can substantially improve both teacher retention and mental health outcomes. By examining the critical intersection between culture, self-care, and mental health among migrant educators, the study offers actionable insights that are valuable for informing educational policy and practice. The findings advocate for schools to prioritize culturally tailored wellness programs that better support diverse teaching populations. Further research is encouraged to expand understanding of self-care practices among migrant educators across various cultural contexts.

Keywords: *self-care, mental well-being, Filipino teachers, migrant educators, cultural adaptation, teacher stress*

Introduction

Teacher well-being is increasingly acknowledged as a pivotal issue in educational psychology, exerting a direct influence on both educator effectiveness and student achievement. McCallum et al. (2017) observed that stressors such as financial difficulties, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate institutional support diminish teachers' job satisfaction and instructional quality. For migrant educators, Hanna et al. (2020) noted that these pressures are amplified by cultural adjustment, social isolation, and unfamiliar institutional norms, which collectively challenge psychological resilience and identity formation.

Filipino teachers in the United States, particularly those in Massachusetts, encounter distinctive stressors rooted in systemic and socio-emotional factors. Teng and Gordon (2021) found that stringent licensure requirements, high accountability standards, and extended separation from family generate considerable strain, a burden compounded by additional certification demands outlined by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2023). Furthermore, Beltman et al. (2021) highlighted that rising living costs and insufficient culturally responsive support contribute to professional dissatisfaction and psychological distress among these educators. Despite their critical contribution to alleviating teacher shortages, Teng and Gordon (2021) emphasized that Filipino educators frequently lack access to mental health resources tailored to their specific cultural and professional needs.

Self-care emerges as a crucial strategy for maintaining teacher well-being in the face of these challenges. Roeser et al. (2021) demonstrated that practices such as mindfulness, spiritual engagement, and social support bolster emotional resilience in educators. Similarly, Falon et al. (2022) indicated that self-care enhances well-being in demanding teaching environments. However, Huynh et al. (2017) noted that the interplay between self-care, cultural identity, and mental health among migrant educators remains insufficiently explored, particularly for Filipino teachers in high-pressure settings such as Massachusetts.

To bridge this gap, the current study employs a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of Filipino teachers in Massachusetts, focusing on how self-care practices support their mental health in the face of cultural and professional stressors. Creswell and Poth (2018) argued that phenomenology excels at uncovering the essence of participants' subjective experiences within their socio-cultural contexts. Smith and Shinebourne (2016) explained that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a method within this framework, facilitates a detailed exploration of how individuals make sense of their internal and external realities, especially in complex cultural systems. This approach suits the study by prioritizing the collaborative meaning-making process between researcher and participant, offering nuanced insights into how Filipino teachers address cultural adaptation, workplace demands, and systemic inequities through self-care.

By emphasizing culturally informed self-care strategies, including faith-based coping, familial and peer support, and mindfulness, this study enriches the discourse on teacher resilience. Smith and Shinebourne (2016) underscored that IPA's idiographic focus captures diverse individual experiences while revealing shared themes that reflect the collective realities of globally recruited educators. These findings have significant implications for policymakers and educational leaders, underscoring the need for culturally responsive wellness initiatives tailored to the unique challenges faced by Filipino teachers in Massachusetts and comparable transnational educator

populations.

Research Questions

This study explored the self-care practices of Filipino teachers in Massachusetts and their impact on mental well-being. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do Filipino teachers in the United States describe their experiences in the U.S. educational system?
2. What self-care practices did Filipino teachers in the U.S. implement to maintain their well-being?
3. What personal and professional challenges did these educators encounter that affected their mental health?
4. In what ways did self-care practices influence the mental well-being of Filipino teachers?
5. What intervention strategies could be developed to enhance Filipino teachers' self-care practices and mental well-being?

Literature Review

Cultural Adjustment: Navigating Dissonance and Isolation

Filipino teachers in the United States often face complex cultural adaptation processes characterized by tension, identity fragmentation, and social disconnection. Kim et al. (2016) observed that migrant educators often experience psychological strain as they strive to maintain their cultural heritage while meeting unfamiliar workplace expectations. In regions like Massachusetts with strict regulatory frameworks, Teng and Gordon (2021) noted that these challenges intensify. The Pioneer Institute (2023) highlighted that rigorous licensure requirements and accountability measures impose prolonged delays, heightened scrutiny, and increased emotional stress on international educators. Additionally, Teng and Gordon (2021) found that institutional barriers, combined with personal difficulties such as family separation and cultural unfamiliarity, exacerbate emotional vulnerability.

Despite these adversities, Filipino teachers exhibit resilience rooted in cultural values such as *Bayanihan*. Enriquez (2017) described *Bayanihan* as a collective tradition of mutual aid that provides emotional fortitude during hardship. Berry (2019) suggested that integrating one's native culture with participation in the host society can effectively enhance well-being. However, Kim et al. (2016) emphasized that existing research lacks depth in examining how this culturally specific coping mechanism operates within demanding educational contexts, such as those in Massachusetts, signaling a need for more targeted, profession-specific studies.

Professional Challenges: Systemic Barriers to Integration

A confluence of cultural adjustment and systemic obstacles shapes the professional integration of Filipino teachers in Massachusetts. According to the Pioneer Institute (2023), the state's certification system imposes stringent standards that disproportionately burden internationally trained educators with additional coursework, costly examinations, and extended waiting periods. Kim et al. (2016) noted that implicit biases and professional marginalization exacerbate these structural challenges, as migrant educators frequently face skepticism about their competence due to perceived linguistic or cultural differences, which are often viewed as shortcomings rather than strengths.

Huynh et al. (2020) observed that migrant educators benefit significantly from culturally responsive mentorship and onboarding programs. However, such support is inconsistently available, leaving many Filipino teachers to address these challenges on their own. Teng and Gordon (2021) underscored that while their resilience is notable, this reliance on individual effort reflects a systemic failure to accommodate cultural and professional diversity within the U.S. education workforce, highlighting an underexplored link between professional disempowerment and cultural stress that warrants culturally tailored policy interventions.

Self-Care Practices: A Multidimensional Approach

Self-care emerges as a vital mechanism for sustaining resilience among Filipino teachers navigating cross-cultural and high-stress educational settings. Roeser et al. (2021) found that intentional self-care practices enable teachers to balance professional demands while preserving mental health. The World Health Organization (2021) emphasized that physical self-care, including proper nutrition, adequate rest, and regular exercise, significantly aids stress management, though demanding schedules often hinder consistent practice.

Mental and emotional self-care serves as a protective buffer against stress. Brown et al. (2020) demonstrated that mindfulness enhances concentration and emotional stability, thereby mitigating the risks of burnout for educators. Travers et al. (2018) noted that journaling and cognitive reframing improve reflective capacity and stress coping. Enriquez (2017) highlighted that for Filipino educators, spiritual practices and faith-based engagement reinforce resilience by cultivating purpose and tranquility, a perspective echoed by Ryff (2018), who underscored the importance of meaning and social connections for psychological well-being.

Social self-care holds particular significance for Filipino teachers, given their cultural emphasis on relational harmony and community ties. Engagement in community activities, religious affiliations, and cultural events, such as Filipino festivals, provides emotional rejuvenation. Grey et al. (2020) affirmed that social support is crucial for immigrant educators combating isolation; however, they noted a gap in understanding how these self-care dimensions adapt to Massachusetts' unique socio-professional landscape, particularly in the face of cultural, environmental, and systemic influences.

Mental Well-Being: The Role of Support Systems and Cultural Adaptation

Mental well-being constitutes both a foundation and an outcome of effective adaptation for Filipino teachers in the United States. Ryff (2018) conceptualized well-being as an integration of self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, and life purpose, elements heavily influenced by institutional and interpersonal support in transnational teaching contexts. Berry (2019) argued that successful acculturation depends on access to culturally attuned mental health resources and inclusive professional settings.

However, Filipino educators in Massachusetts often face inconsistent support. Cleofas and Mijares (2022) observed that the absence of culturally responsive systems heightens stress and erodes job satisfaction among migrant teachers. Conversely, Huynh et al. (2020) found that culturally grounded self-care practices, such as mindfulness and community engagement, foster better emotional stability and resilience, underscoring that well-being is intricately tied to socio-cultural contexts rather than solely to individual effort. Nevertheless, the specific interplay between systemic marginalization, cultural identity, and self-care among Filipino teachers in distinct settings, such as Massachusetts, remains underexplored. This critical research gap is addressed by this study, which examines how culturally rooted self-care sustains mental well-being.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological research design to investigate the lived experiences of Filipino teachers in Massachusetts as they navigated self-care amidst cultural and professional challenges. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that phenomenology focuses on elucidating the essence of individuals' experiences with a specific phenomenon through qualitative inquiry. By prioritizing participants' narratives and perspectives, this approach provided a comprehensive exploration of their coping mechanisms, responses to occupational stress, and encounters with social isolation, offering rich insights into their self-care practices.

Participants

The study targeted Filipino teachers in Massachusetts, including volunteer educators affiliated with Iskwelahang Pilipino, to investigate how they foster resilience and sustain well-being within the U.S. educational system. Teng and Gordon (2021) examined how these educators adapt and persevere in the face of multifaceted challenges. To ensure sufficient experiential depth, Palinkas et al. (2015) recommended including only participants with at least three years of teaching experience in the United States, allowing adequate time for adjustment to the educational context and establishment of self-care routines.

Participants encompassed both Filipino-born and second-generation Filipino American educators working in formal academic institutions and community-based programs. To maintain focus and safeguard participant well-being, the researcher excluded individuals lacking teaching experience in Massachusetts and those currently experiencing severe mental health difficulties. Creswell and Poth (2018) advocated for purposive sampling to select participants with direct, relevant experiences, enhancing the study's depth. Recruitment was conducted through Filipino teacher associations, educational networks, and social media platforms, ensuring a diverse and contextually appropriate sample.

Instrument

Two primary instruments were employed: a semi-structured interview guide and a focus group discussion (FGD) guide, both designed to probe the self-care practices and mental well-being of Filipino teachers in Massachusetts. The interview guide was structured into three key phases: establishing rapport, identifying barriers to self-care, and exploring resilience and coping strategies. These questions encouraged participants to reflect deeply on their experiences, facilitating a thorough examination of self-care within cultural and professional contexts.

The FGD guide was crafted to elicit collective perspectives on cultural adaptation, self-care strategies, and peer support systems, fostering interactive dialogue among participants to reveal shared experiences and communal approaches to well-being. Validation of both instruments involved three experts. An educational specialist with a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership evaluated the content's validity and relevance to teaching challenges. A licensed psychometrician with a Ph.D. in Mental Health and Counseling evaluated psychological appropriateness and methodological rigor. An academic with a Ph.D. and a master's degree in English reviewed the linguistic clarity and cultural sensitivity. Their combined feedback affirmed the validity, coherence, and cultural suitability of the instruments for capturing Filipino educators' perspectives.

Procedure

The researcher secured ethical approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee and obtained formal permission from Iskwelahang Pilipino to engage its volunteer educators. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested leveraging teacher networks, community organizations, and online forums for recruitment to ensure a broad and meaningful participant pool. Data collection consisted of five semi-structured interviews and five focus group discussions (FGDs), each designed to elicit detailed narratives on self-care and mental well-being. This was supplemented by two weeks of reflective journal entries from participants, capturing real-time insights into their

emotional experiences and coping strategies.

All interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, with participant names replaced by coded identifiers to maintain confidentiality. Tracy (2020) recommended follow-up peer debriefing sessions to enhance data trustworthiness, allowing participants to clarify or expand their responses and ensuring the authenticity of their narratives was preserved.

Data Analysis

Smith and Shinebourne (2016) outlined Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the guiding framework for thematically analyzing how participants made sense of their experiences of self-care. Braun and Clarke (2021) provided a structured approach to coding, enabling the identification of key themes such as cultural adjustment, emotional resilience, and coping strategies rooted in both individual and collective practices. Insight7 software supported the organization and categorization of data across interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and journal entries. To bolster reliability, Tracy (2020) advocated for peer debriefing and thematic triangulation, ensuring consistent interpretation across multiple data sources.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards to protect participants' rights, privacy, and emotional well-being. Braun et al. (2021) emphasized transparency and voluntary participation as critical ethical tenets in qualitative research. Participants received a comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose, potential risks, benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time, followed by written informed consent.

Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all transcripts and journal entries, which were securely stored in encrypted, password-protected digital archives. This approach aligned with the U.S. Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA; U.S. Department of Education, 2021) and the Philippines' Data Privacy Act (National Privacy Commission, 2016 update). Jackson and Bazeley (2019) emphasized the importance of robust data security in cross-cultural research, a principle that this study also upheld. Given the sensitive nature of mental health discussions, regular well-being check-ins were conducted, and access to mental health resources was provided upon request, reinforcing commitment to participant care and safety.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the findings from a qualitative study of Filipino teachers in Massachusetts based on data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The results are structured according to the study's research questions, with thematic analysis conducted within an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework. Each research problem is addressed sequentially, supported by tables summarizing core themes, sub-themes, and codes. The discussion integrates these findings with relevant literature to provide context and emphasize their implications.

1. Lived Experiences of Filipino Teachers in the United States

The lived experiences of Filipino teachers in the U.S. reflect a dynamic interplay of cultural adaptation, professional transitions, and identity negotiation. Three core themes emerged from the analysis: Cultural Adjustment, Professional Journey, and Community and Identity.

Table 1. Summary of Core Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes – Lived Experiences of Filipino Teachers

Core Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Cultural Adjustment	Navigating Cultural Differences	Adapting to Western norms, managing cultural expectations
	Maintaining Filipino Heritage	Volunteering, cultural preservation, fostering belonging
Professional Journey	Transitioning into Teaching	Teaching as a second career, diverse classroom dynamics
	Balancing Expectations	Overcoming imposter syndrome, systemic biases
Community and Identity	Building Connections	Participation in cultural communities, support networks
	Dual Identity Challenges	Balancing Filipino American identity, defining 'home'

The thematic patterns outlined in Table 1 reveal three interconnected dimensions that shape the experiences of Filipino teachers in the United States: cultural adjustment, professional transition, and the negotiation of community and identity. Collectively, these dimensions encapsulate the intricate emotional, cultural, and professional transitions participants navigated while integrating into American society and its educational landscape, offering a comprehensive view of their adaptive strategies and challenges.

Cultural Adjustment

Cultural adjustment emerged as a central concern as Filipino teachers endeavored to reconcile American cultural expectations with their Filipino heritage. Participants frequently encountered difficulties adapting to unfamiliar norms, particularly the individualistic tendencies prevalent in American society, which contrasted sharply with their collectivist cultural background. To preserve their cultural roots, teachers engaged in practices such as participating in organizations like Iskwelahang Pilipino, celebrating Filipino

traditions, and using their native language at home. Berry (2019) described this dual engagement as integration, a process in which individuals adopt elements of the host culture while retaining their heritage, which is recognized as highly adaptive for migrant well-being (Berry, 2019). These intentional preservation efforts not only eased their adjustment but also bolstered emotional resilience and fostered a more profound sense of belonging.

Professional Transition

Ongoing transitions, uncertainty, and adaptation characterized the professional journey of participants. Many individuals entered the U.S. education system with prior teaching experience from diverse cultural and educational contexts, facing significant challenges in aligning with American professional expectations, instructional norms, and educational standards. Subthemes such as transitioning into new roles and managing expectations underscored experiences of professional insecurity, particularly when their previous methods were undervalued or questioned by colleagues or administrators. Participants often reported feelings akin to impostor syndrome, driven by the need to prove competence amid unfamiliar curricula and pedagogical approaches. Teng and Gordon (2021) noted that such challenges reflect a broader struggle for internationally trained educators to adapt simultaneously to new cultural and professional environments. Nevertheless, participants demonstrated resilience through mentorship, professional development, and collaborative learning initiatives.

Negotiation of Community and Identity

Negotiating community involvement and cultural identity proved vital to participants' well-being and professional efficacy. Teachers emphasized the emotional support and communal bonds derived from Filipino cultural groups and informal networks, which served as affirming spaces that mitigated social isolation. However, they also faced tensions in balancing American norms with Filipino values, as they navigated a bicultural existence. Huynh et al. (2020) emphasized that community engagement offers crucial social support for migrants, thereby reinforcing their emotional well-being and cultural identity (Huynh et al., 2020). For these teachers, active participation in cultural communities was a key strategy for maintaining cultural integrity while meeting new social and professional demands, illustrating the dynamic interplay of identity management.

The interwoven themes of cultural adjustment, professional transition, and negotiation of community and identity offer a holistic portrayal of Filipino teachers' lived experiences within the U.S. educational context. Each dimension provides unique insights, yet together they illuminate the daily pressures and adaptive strategies shaping participants' realities. The integration of cultural identity, adept navigation of professional expectations, and sustenance of community ties collectively highlight their resilience. These findings align with Berry's (2019) acculturation framework, Teng and Gordon's (2021) research on transnational educators' adaptation, and Huynh et al.'s (2020) emphasis on community as a source of emotional and identity support, enriching the understanding of how Filipino teachers thrive amid cultural and professional transitions.

2. Challenges and Barriers to Self-Care Practices

Filipino teachers identified several barriers that hindered their ability to engage in self-care, categorized into Personal, Environmental, and cultural domains.

Table 2. Summary of Core Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes – Challenges and Barriers in Self-Care Practices

<i>Core Themes</i>	<i>Sub-Themes</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Personal Barriers	Time and Scheduling Constraints	Limited time, juggling responsibilities
	Emotional Barriers	Guilt over prioritizing self-care
Environmental Challenges	Weather-related Factors	Cold climate limits outdoor activities
Cultural Barriers	Cultural Expectations	Balancing familial expectations, cultural pressure

Insights from Table 2 illuminate the significant barriers Filipino teachers faced in practicing self-care, categorized into three interrelated domains: personal, environmental, and cultural. These obstacles frequently overlap, hindering consistent self-care engagement despite participants' awareness of its importance, highlighting the complex interplay of factors that shape their well-being.

Personal Barriers

Participants identified personal barriers such as demanding schedules, chronic fatigue, and emotional exhaustion as primary impediments to regular self-care. Many juggled full-time teaching duties with providing financial and emotional support to extended families in the Philippines, resulting in profound physical and emotional depletion that left little room for personal care. Additionally, teachers often experienced guilt when allocating time for themselves, viewing self-care as a luxury rather than a necessity. David et al. (2017) attributed this guilt to deeply rooted Filipino cultural norms that emphasize self-sacrifice and familial priority over individual well-being (David et al., 2017). This internalization of cultural values framed self-care as a source of emotional conflict, further complicating its adoption.

Subthemes of time constraints and emotional guilt underscored how these internalized norms obstructed health-promoting behaviors. Johnson et al. (2019) noted that educators frequently contend with intense emotional labor, constrained personal time, and heavy workloads, which are amplified for migrant teachers managing dual responsibilities across both personal and professional spheres.

These findings highlight the need for wellness strategies tailored to accommodate demanding schedules and address the emotional complexities that Filipino educators face in prioritizing self-care.

Environmental Barriers

Environmental factors posed substantial barriers to effective self-care engagement. Participants cited Massachusetts' cold climate as a significant obstacle, noting that extended winters reduced their motivation and opportunities for outdoor physical activity. Accustomed to tropical conditions, teachers found the seasonal shift physically taxing and emotionally discouraging, which limited their recreational pursuits. Camacho and Johnson (2017) observed that weather-related changes similarly diminish physical activity among immigrant populations, increasing susceptibility to mood disturbances (Camacho & Johnson, 2017). Likewise, Lee and Ma (2021) confirmed that environmental conditions, such as climate and daylight availability, have a profound influence on health behaviors. Consequently, these environmental barriers manifested as both practical constraints on physical activity and contributors to diminished emotional well-being.

Cultural Barriers

Cultural expectations further complicated participants' self-care efforts. Teachers often prioritized familial responsibilities and cultural obligations over personal well-being, perceiving self-care as secondary to their roles as caregivers, breadwinners, and community exemplars within Filipino cultural frameworks. They reported facing societal pressures to prioritize family needs, often at the expense of their health. Santos (2022) explained that Filipino traditions typically prioritize family and community duties over personal well-being, fostering internal pressures and psychological barriers to self-care (Santos, 2022). This cultural expectation frequently led to persistent guilt or anxiety when teachers attempted to focus on their wellness, reinforcing the challenge of sustaining such practices.

The identified barriers collectively demonstrate the intricate convergence of personal, environmental, and cultural factors influencing self-care behaviors among Filipino teachers. Time scarcity, emotional exhaustion, environmental constraints, and collectivist values are intertwined to create a challenging landscape for prioritizing well-being. These observations align with existing scholarship, where Johnson et al. (2019) highlighted institutional workloads, Lee and Ma (2021) emphasized environmental impacts, and Santos (2022) underscored cultural pressures as significant factors influencing teacher well-being. This complexity necessitates culturally informed, context-sensitive interventions to empower Filipino educators to effectively incorporate realistic and sustainable self-care practices into their lives.

Problem 3: Personal and Professional Challenges Affecting Mental Well-Being

The study uncovered interconnected personal and professional challenges impacting mental health, categorized into Emotional and Mental Health Struggles, Professional Efficacy, and Identity Conflicts.

Table 3. Summary of the Core Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes of Challenges that Filipino teachers face personally and professionally that affect their mental well-being.

<i>Core Themes</i>	<i>Sub-Themes</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Personal Challenges	Social Isolation and Loneliness	Homesickness, isolation from family
	Emotional and Mental Health	Anxiety, emotional fatigue, burnout
	Identity and Societal Expectations	Identity crisis, societal and familial pressures
Professional Challenges	Professional Efficacy	Pressure to prove competence, administrative tasks
	Balancing Expectations	Work-life balance, leadership roles

The findings presented in Table 3 highlight the complex personal and professional challenges faced by Filipino teachers in the United States, demonstrating how these interconnected stressors significantly impact their mental well-being. Two primary themes emerged from participants' narratives: personal challenges and professional challenges, encapsulating the emotional, relational, and occupational pressures inherent in their transnational teaching roles.

Personal Challenges

Participants articulated personal challenges that included social isolation, homesickness, emotional fatigue, and internal conflicts related to their cultural identity. They frequently described the emotional toll of separation from immediate and extended family, expressing persistent loneliness and a deep yearning for familiar environments. Establishing meaningful connections in culturally unfamiliar settings proved difficult, intensifying their sense of displacement. David et al. (2017) emphasized that social disconnection and identity struggles significantly undermine migrants' mental health (David et al., 2017). Participants reported that the absence of familial and cultural support networks disrupted their emotional equilibrium, amplifying broader questions of identity and belonging. Cleofas and Mijares (2022) reinforced this observation, noting that prolonged family separation and cultural disconnection among Filipino migrants strongly correlate with elevated psychological distress and emotional exhaustion.

Professional Challenges

Professional challenges further compounded participants' mental strain, with a recurring need to affirm their competence within an education system that is often skeptical of their qualifications or imposes unfamiliar expectations. Teachers felt compelled to surpass

typical performance benchmarks in order to counter subtle biases associated with their international training or accents. Key stressors included administrative overload, classroom management difficulties, and elevated leadership expectations, frequently leading to feelings of inadequacy and chronic stress. Greenberg et al. (2016) highlighted that educators globally experience substantial occupational stress. This burden is particularly acute for migrant teachers who must adapt swiftly to new pedagogical norms and institutional demands without adequate support (Greenberg et al., 2016).

Subthemes of professional efficacy and balancing expectations illuminated the dual pressures of meeting rigorous standards while acclimating to a foreign system. Participants often cited the challenge of managing simultaneous responsibilities, such as lesson planning, student assessment, and parental communication, compounded by subtle exclusion or misinterpretation from colleagues and administrators. This accumulation of demands heightened emotional fatigue, leaving minimal opportunities for recovery or reflection, thus further eroding their mental well-being.

A critical insight from these findings is the reciprocal relationship between personal and professional stressors, forming a cyclical pattern that intensifies psychological strain. Homesickness and identity-related struggles depleted teachers' emotional reserves, impairing their capacity to address workplace demands effectively. Conversely, persistent job stress and overwork diminished their ability to engage in restorative practices or access support networks. This cumulative effect often manifests as sustained emotional depletion, anxiety, self-doubt, and, in some instances, burnout.

These observations align with contemporary research on migrant educators' mental health. David et al. (2017) and Cleofas and Mijares (2022) demonstrated that emotional difficulties among migrant populations frequently arise from social and cultural disconnection. In contrast, Greenberg et al. (2016) noted that unsupportive professional environments exacerbate stress, particularly given the inherent emotional labor of teaching. Collectively, these findings underscore the pressing need for culturally sensitive, context-specific support systems that address both the personal and professional dimensions of mental well-being among Filipino migrant educators, thereby fostering resilience in the face of their unique challenges.

Problem 4: Impact of Self-Care Practices on Mental Well-Being

The analysis showed significant positive outcomes resulting from self-care practices, which were categorized as evolved emotional resilience, enhanced physical health, improved social connections, and personal mastery.

Table 4. *Summary of the Core Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes: The Impact of Self-Care Practices on Filipino Teachers' Mental Well-being.*

<i>Core Themes</i>	<i>Sub-Themes</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Evolved Emotional Resilience	Reflection and Relaxation	Mindfulness, emotional regulation, stress management
Enhanced Physical Well-being	Health-Conscious Practices	Regular exercise, a balanced diet, and sufficient rest
Improved Social Connections	Community and Family Support	Community engagement, peer and family support
Personal Mastery	Professional Efficacy	Reflective practices, leadership roles, boundary setting

Table 4 delineates the multifaceted benefits of self-care in enhancing the mental well-being of Filipino teachers, spanning emotional stability, physical wellness, interpersonal connections, and professional growth. Participants consistently highlighted that intentional self-care practices enabled them to manage stress, maintain emotional balance, and strengthen resilience, underscoring the critical role of these strategies in their transnational teaching experiences.

Emotional Stability

Participants reported that deliberate self-care practices, such as mindfulness, journaling, and prayer, empowered them to cope with stress effectively, stabilize their emotions, and sustain inner calm amidst external pressures. These activities fostered a deep sense of tranquility and reinforced psychological resilience against personal and professional challenges. Roeser et al. (2021) found that mindfulness training diminishes emotional exhaustion while enhancing self-compassion, bolstering teachers' ability to navigate workplace demands (Roeser et al., 2021). This evidence highlights the significant impact of such practices on long-term emotional well-being.

Physical Wellness

Beyond emotional benefits, participants noted significant improvements in their physical health through self-care. Many educators described how integrating regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, and adequate rest into their routines sustained their energy levels and reduced stress-related physical symptoms. Chekroud et al. (2018) demonstrated that consistent physical activity markedly elevates mood and alleviates depressive symptoms, particularly among working adults (Chekroud et al., 2018). For these teachers, physical self-care served as both a health-promoting strategy and a foundation for the stamina required in teaching, enabling sustained classroom engagement and supporting their emotional and professional resilience.

Interpersonal Relationships

Social support emerged as a vital dimension enriched by self-care practices. Participants explained that maintaining relationships with family, participating in church or cultural communities, and spending time with friends helped cultivate a sense of belonging, countering

the isolation often experienced during migration. These connections offered essential emotional support, providing comfort during stressful periods. Grey et al. (2020) affirmed that strong social support networks significantly mitigate psychological distress and enhance resilience, especially for migrant professionals adapting to new cultural contexts (Grey et al., 2020). For Filipino teachers, engaging in culturally meaningful social activities proved restorative, reinforcing their sense of identity and emotional well-being.

Professional Development

Personal mastery surfaced as a significant outcome of sustained self-care efforts. Teachers indicated that setting boundaries, engaging in self-reflection, and affirming their professional identity enhanced their sense of agency and confidence in their roles. They reported improved classroom management, refined decision-making skills, and a more balanced integration of work and personal life. Slavin et al. (2021) noted that intentional self-care among educators positively correlates with job satisfaction, professional efficacy, and reduced burnout (Slavin et al., 2021). For many participants, self-care was intricately woven into their broader pursuit of personal and professional flourishing, linking emotional, physical, and occupational strengths.

Problem 5: What intervention strategies can be developed to enhance Filipino teachers' self-care practices and mental well-being?

Based on the study's findings, three culturally responsive intervention frameworks were developed: MOVE (Physical-Social Integration), CARE (Mental Health and Resilience), and GROW (Spiritual and Emotional Health). These frameworks constitute a multidimensional approach to enhancing the well-being of Filipino teachers, addressing the interconnected domains of physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Collectively, MOVE, CARE, and GROW acknowledge that teacher well-being emerges not solely from individual efforts but also from cultural identity, social connections, and community engagement, providing a holistic strategy rooted in participants' lived experiences.

MOVE: Physical-Social Integration

The MOVE framework promotes physical and social well-being by incorporating movement-based activities steeped in Filipino culture. Practices such as Tinikling and culturally adapted Zumba sessions not only enhance cardiovascular health but also strengthen cultural identity and social bonds. Participants reported that these activities fostered a sense of belonging and familiarity, thereby alleviating the isolation often associated with migration. Chekroud et al. (2018) demonstrated that regular physical activity bolsters psychological well-being by reducing anxiety and depression (Chekroud et al., 2018). Similarly, Chan et al. (2021) found that culturally tailored physical interventions increase engagement and emotional health by reinforcing cultural roots (Chan et al., 2021). These findings suggest that embedding culturally resonant elements into wellness programs enhances both physical vitality and emotional resilience. Schools can implement MOVE through regular cultural movement sessions, such as community dance classes or staff wellness initiatives featuring Filipino music and rhythms.

CARE: Mental Health and Resilience

The CARE framework supports mental health and emotional resilience through mindfulness exercises, reflective journaling, and targeted stress management techniques, directly addressing participants' reported emotional exhaustion and workplace stress. Roeser et al. (2021) found that mindfulness practices can mitigate emotional fatigue and enhance self-regulation among educators (Roeser et al., 2021). Reflective journaling offers a structured and private means for teachers to process their experiences and manage complex emotions effectively. Falon et al. (2022) observed that resilience-focused interventions reduce burnout while enhancing psychological well-being (Falon et al., 2022). Within CARE, these tools foster emotional clarity and personal agency, enabling teachers to confront daily challenges effectively. Educational institutions can integrate CARE by incorporating brief mindfulness activities into staff meetings or offering optional journaling groups, thereby fostering sustainable and culturally sensitive emotional support.

GROW: Spiritual and Emotional Health

The GROW framework fosters spiritual and emotional well-being by creating communal spaces for prayer, meditation, and cultural celebrations, acknowledging spirituality as a vital source of strength for many Filipino teachers. Participants emphasized that shared prayer and culturally significant rituals provided emotional stability and reinforced collective values. Hechanova et al. (2018) highlighted that faith-based practices sustain emotional balance among Filipino migrant workers during cultural transitions (Hechanova et al., 2018). Likewise, Tuason et al. (2021) noted that community rituals and faith fortify identity and protect against psychological distress (Tuason et al., 2021). GROW's communal emphasis supports individual reflection and enhances collective well-being through culturally meaningful participation. Schools can adopt GROW by providing quiet reflection areas, observing cultural celebration days, or partnering with community organizations for inclusive implementation.

Together, MOVE, CARE, and GROW tackle the unique challenges of cultural displacement, professional stress, and emotional exhaustion faced by Filipino teachers. By intertwining cultural significance and communal values with self-care strategies, these frameworks offer a structured, identity-affirming approach to well-being. This culturally responsive model not only strengthens individual resilience but also enriches the educational environment, providing a practical blueprint for supporting transnational educators effectively.

Conclusions

This study examined the lived experiences, self-care practices, challenges, and mental well-being of Filipino teachers in Massachusetts, offering critical insights into their unique realities as educators navigating a transnational context. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the research revealed recurring themes of cultural adjustment, professional marginalization, and identity negotiation, highlighting the struggles and resilience inherent in their teaching journeys.

The study's Filipino teachers described navigating the dissonance between collectivist cultural values and the individualistic norms of the U.S., often resulting in emotional strain and feelings of social isolation. Professionally, they encountered systemic barriers, including unfamiliar pedagogical expectations, implicit biases, and administrative demands that contributed to imposter syndrome and occupational stress. Despite these challenges, engagement with cultural communities such as *Iskwelahang Pilipino* was a vital source of identity affirmation and social connection, underscoring the critical role of culturally rooted support systems.

Self-care emerged as a protective strategy and a necessary response to the emotional and professional demands of participants. Self-care contributes to emotional resilience, physical vitality, improved social connections, and professional efficacy when practiced consistently. However, consistent engagement was hindered by time constraints, cultural expectations that prioritize others over oneself, and environmental limitations. These findings underscore the need for responsive, culturally sensitive support mechanisms that recognize the complex realities Filipino teachers encounter.

This study proposed three culturally grounded intervention frameworks to address these needs: MOVE, CARE, and GROW. MOVE emphasizes physical health and community bonding through culturally relevant movement activities. CARE focuses on emotional resilience through mindfulness, journaling, and stress management practices. GROW centers on spiritual and emotional grounding through collective rituals, prayer, and cultural celebration. Together, these frameworks provide a holistic and practical approach to supporting the well-being of Filipino teachers, grounded in their cultural values and lived realities.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the limited literature on Filipino teachers in the U.S. educational system and its call for schools to implement inclusive, culturally responsive practices. Institutions that aim to support and retain globally recruited teachers must consider their cultural identities, community needs, and emotional well-being. The MOVE, CARE, and GROW frameworks present a replicable and adaptable model for Filipino teachers and other culturally diverse educators navigating similar challenges.

While the study is geographically focused on Massachusetts, its implications extend more broadly. Future research should investigate the application of these frameworks in other regions or countries and evaluate their long-term effects on teacher well-being, retention, and performance. Continued inquiry can explore peer mentoring, policy alignment, and institutional readiness for culturally embedded wellness interventions.

This study advocates for a shift toward systemic support structures that acknowledge the holistic nature of well-being and the cultural dimensions of care by centering on the voices of Filipino teachers and honoring their resilience. When educational institutions acknowledge and affirm their educators' diverse identities, they create more inclusive schools and stronger learning communities.

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