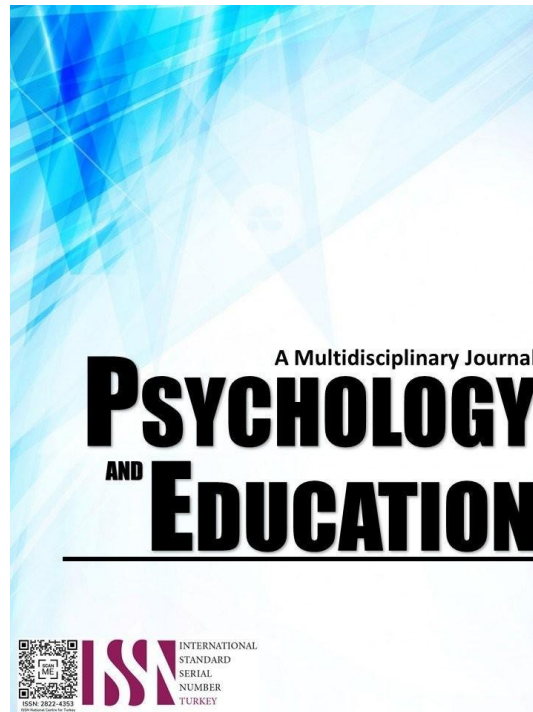


HOMETOWN RETURN: AN EXPLORATION OF MATHEMATICS TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AFTER THE J-1 PROGRAM



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Hometown Return: An Exploration of Mathematics Teachers' Experiences After the J-1 Program

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional and personal reintegration experiences of Filipino mathematics teachers upon returning to their home country after completing the J-1 Teacher Exchange Program in the United States. The research aimed to explore the challenges faced, adaptation strategies employed, and the broader implications of international teaching experiences on re-entry. Through in-depth interviews with former J-1 teachers, the study uncovered themes related to reverse culture shock, shifts in professional identity, career advancement and professional development, professional and interpersonal relationships, professional and cultural re-entry challenges, and the reintegration process and the policies adoption. Findings reveal that while participants gained valuable skills and global perspectives during their time abroad, many encountered difficulties in re-establishing their professional roles and navigating cultural readjustment. Nonetheless, their resilience, reflective practices, and commitment to educational excellence enabled them to adapt and continue making meaningful contributions in their local contexts. The study offers insights for policymakers, educational institutions, and returning educators in developing more supportive re-entry pathways and maximizing the benefits of global teaching experiences.

Keywords: *J-1 Teacher, Filipino mathematics teachers, professional re-entry, adaptation strategies, cross-cultural adaptation*

Introduction

Returning home after working abroad is often seen as a joyful reunion, but for many professionals, it can be a complex and challenging transition. Geeraert et al. (2022) found that returnees frequently face "reverse culture shock," where their expectations of home clash with reality. This mismatch can cause psychological stress, reduced well-being, and a sense of alienation. This is especially true for Filipino J-1 Mathematics teachers who once embraced the chance to teach in the United States. After years of adapting to a different educational system, professional culture, and lifestyle, returning to the Philippines presents unique challenges, such as re-establishing professional roles, aligning teaching methodologies with local curricula, and managing the emotional and psychological aspects of reintegration.

As a result, for these teachers, returning to the Philippines is more than just going home. It marks a significant shift that redefines their professional and personal identities. While the J-1 program, Cultural Exchange Program, has played a vital role in promoting international cultural and educational exchange, allowing foreign educators to teach in accredited primary and secondary schools in the United States for up to three years (BridgeUSAPrograms | BridgeUSA, n.d.), there is limited research on the experiences of these educators after they return to their home countries. "Re-entry remains a vastly overlooked under-supported, and under-funded part of most everyone's abroad experience" (Dr. Brubaker, Helping Returnees).

Upon returning to the Philippine education system, the professional re-entry of Filipino J-1 teachers is often affected with the challenges. "I applied to many schools when we arrived here in Cebu, but I have not secured a job yet. Unfortunately, once they learn that I am a J-1 teacher, they often assume I'll only be here for two years." (J-1 teacher, personal communication, September 8, 2024). Professional re-entry is one of the challenges that a J-1 teacher encounters, especially with the J-1 program of a teacher usually ends around June and July of each year. "I am currently experiencing financial, emotional, and social struggles during my re-entry. Additionally, I am dealing with depression due to my current lifestyle, which is different from the lifestyle I had in the U.S." (another J-1 teacher, personal communication, September 23, 2024).

This conversation with the J-1 teachers has drawn the interest of the researcher to learn more about what happens after J-1 teachers return home from their work in the United States. When one becomes discontented with one's home culture, a common reaction is to resist adapting to it. Stori C. (2001) highlighted that the frustrations and disillusionment associated with being back "home" can lead to self-doubt. As a result, reverse culture shock frequently comes with a touch of depression. The shift from program life to reality after the program can be very challenging to one's professional and personal life (Smith, 2018).

Research indicates that international teaching experiences greatly enhance educators' instructional practices, leadership skills, and adaptability (Cochran-Smith et al., 2019). However, the transition back to one's home country presents unique challenges, as teachers must adjust their teaching methodologies, meet changing institutional expectations, and reintegrate into the socio-cultural environment they had temporarily left (Cox, 2019). Existing literature on re-entry adaptation has mostly focused on corporate expatriates and migrant workers (Szkudlarek, 2010), and studies on returning teachers remain limited, particularly in the Philippine context. Understanding their experiences is crucial for identifying the challenges they face and the strategies they use to integrate their international experiences with the realities of the local education system.

The study explores the lived experiences of J-1 Mathematics teachers upon their return to the Philippines after participating the program. Through this study, we aim to contribute to the understanding of how the Filipino J-Math teachers reintegrating in the workforce can be better supported after the J1 program experience and investigate the potentials of their use of international teaching practices in the improvement of mathematics education in the Philippines. By understanding these experiences, this study intends to provide valuable insights into re-entry adaptation, shed light on the successes and challenges of their professional reintegration and inform policy recommendations that maximize the potential of returning educators in strengthening mathematics education in the country.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of J-1 Mathematics teachers upon their return to the Philippines after participating the program. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the Filipino J-1 Mathematics teachers upon their return to the Philippines?
2. What is the essence of these experiences?
3. What compendium of pedagogical strategies in Mathematics can be developed?

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design rooted in descriptive phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of the mathematics teachers as they returned to their home countries after participating in the J-1 cultural exchange program. Qualitative research was well-suited for this study as it facilitated an in-depth exploration of the participants' personal and professional journeys, allowing for rich, detailed descriptions that captured the essence of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodology enabled the researcher to gather insights into returning teachers' challenges, transformations, and adaptation strategies, offering a comprehensive understanding of their reintegration process.

Descriptive phenomenology, based on the philosophy of Tufford and Newman (2012), guided the methodology to capture the lived experiences of the participants as they perceived and described them. The goal of descriptive phenomenology was to describe phenomena in their purest form, allowing the essence of participants' experiences to emerge without the researcher's subjective interpretation (Speziale & Carpenter, 2011). In this context, the study explored how the teachers' international exposure and teaching experiences influenced their professional identities, teaching practices, and career development after returning home. To avoid researcher bias, the process of bracketing was employed, wherein the researcher set aside personal assumptions and preconceptions to remain open to the participants' authentic voices (Tufford and Newman, 2012). According to Stockl, A (2008), phenomenology explored the subjective lived experiences of humans and sought to understand the "what is" of human existence. It emphasized that humans experienced the world through their own unique perspectives. This approach also provided an ideal framework for exploring how these teachers perceived and made sense of their professional reintegration.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 15 mathematics teachers who had completed or were engaged in at least one year of teaching in the Philippines after their participation in the J-1 program. Among them, seven were male, and eight were female as shown in table 1 below. To be included in the study, participants had to meet the following criteria: they must have taught for a minimum of one year in the Philippines, have been located within the province of Cebu, and have successfully completed their J-1 program in the United States.

Table 1. Gender Composition of the Participants

Male	7
Female	8

Teachers who did not meet these criteria, such as those who had not yet returned to the Philippines, those who had taught for less than a year post-J-1 program, or those teaching outside Cebu province, were excluded from the study. This selection ensured that the study focused on educators who had undergone the process of professional reintegration within the local educational system of Cebu, highlighting the perspectives of both male and female teachers as they navigated the challenges and opportunities of their post-J-1 teaching careers.

Initially, the researcher utilized purposive sampling to select participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. This method is commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals with specific characteristics pertinent to the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Due to the limited number of eligible participants, the sampling approach transitioned to snowball sampling. This technique involves existing participants referring to other individuals who also meet the criteria (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017). In this study, one participant referred to a colleague, who then referred another, and the chain continued until 15 participants were recruited.

To facilitate the participant's recruitment, the researcher mainly used online communication platforms such as Facebook Messenger and relied on personal and professional networks for referrals. This approach was necessary in reaching eligible participants,

particularly given the study's focus on returning J-1 mathematics teachers within Cebu province.

Instrument

After carefully reading various studies and articles with qualitative design, the researcher had decided on the instrument to be used in the study. The researcher served as the main instrument of the study, functioning as the primary data collection tool. The study employed data gathering with a semi-structured interview guide, which was validated by a research expert to ensure its relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study's objectives. Recordings were made using a cellphone and a laptop to explore the lived experiences of the participants after their participation in the J-1 program.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather detailed descriptions of the participants' thoughts and feelings. According to Creswell (2013), this interview format provided the flexibility needed to elicit responses that could reveal the participants' emotions and feelings. Moreover, this format was flexible, where questions were not predetermined within discussions and consistently addressed the same subjects relevant to all interviews. Thus, this allowed the researcher to draw subjects further into a topic when they expressed an interest in it, add another question if the conversation led in an unexpected direction, and find links between questions based on the respondents' responses.

Category of Questions. To ensure a structured yet open-ended conversation, the interview guide questions were categorized into three main sections such as preliminary questions, content questions and closing questions.

- Preliminary Questions. These questions aimed to gather background information of the participants.
- How many years of teaching experience do you have in the U.S.?
- How many years have you been teaching in the Philippines after completing the J-1 program?
- Can you share a little about your teaching background before joining the J-1 program?
- What motivated you to participate in the J-1 program as a mathematics teacher?

Content Questions. These questions aimed to explore the lived experiences of the teachers after the J-1 program.

- How would you describe your teaching experience while in the J-1 program?
- What were the main differences in teaching styles, curriculum, or student engagement between the U.S. and the Philippines?
- Can you recall any significant moments during your time abroad that impacted your approach to teaching mathematics?
- How did you feel about returning to your hometown to teach after the J-1 program? What expectations did you have?
- What challenges did you face when reintegrating into your local school system, and how did you adapt and cope with these experiences?
- Were there any difficulties in adapting back to the teaching methods or school culture in your hometown?
- How has your time abroad influenced your identity as a mathematics teacher?
- How have you used the teaching techniques from the J-1 program in your current teaching? What strategies have you adopted to blend these new methods with your existing approach?
- What personal and professional support from the community was available to you upon returning home? Did you feel adequately supported during your re-entry?
- How has your school or the broader educational system responded to your international teaching experience? Have you had opportunities to share your insights with others?
- What are your thoughts on the long-term impact of your J-1 experience on your career as a mathematics teacher?

Wrap-up Questions. These questions aimed to give opportunities for additional insights.

- Have you heard about the “Balik Turo Program of the Philippines – SPIMS ‘Sa Pinas Ikaw ang Ma’am at Sir’?”
- Is there anything else about your experience after the J-1 program that you would like to share?

Utilizing an interview guide ensures that the researcher facilitates the conversation without dominating it, thereby encouraging participants to share their lived experiences in their own words. According to Magnusson and Marecek (2015), a well-prepared interview guide serves as a memory aid to ensure comprehensive coverage of topics, allowing for a conversational and relaxed tone that enables participants to express their experiences authentically. Additionally, developing an interview guide is crucial for obtaining data that directly addresses the research questions, as it helps in structuring the interview to elicit detailed and relevant information from participants.

Procedure

The study followed a systematic method of gathering data. It adhered to three distinct phases: pre-data gathering, actual data gathering, and post-data gathering.

Pre-Data Gathering. In this phase of the study, the researcher identified the research problem or question that the study aims to address, reviewed the existing literature on the research topic to further support the study, formulated the research questions that the researcher aims to answer, selected a research design that is appropriate for the research questions or hypotheses. Afterwards, the researcher purposely selected participants in the study that represents the population of interest. Subsequently, the researcher selected data

collection methods that are appropriate for the research questions. Lastly, the researcher developed and adapted data collection instrument, semi-structured interview guide questions.

The researcher underwent the following phases for data gathering such as concept evaluation, editing, and ethics application. The researcher got the title proposal approved by the Dean, prepared the first three chapters, and evaluated through the design hearing. After editing and revising based on the compliance checklist of the records of proceedings, it was then submitted to the research specialist for endorsement. Furthermore, the edited version together with other necessary documents like Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms were submitted to the Research and Ethics Committee (REC) of the school for approval, and the researcher waited for the issuance of the Notice to Proceed (NTP) certificate to continue to conduct the study.

Actual Data Gathering. This phase of the study involved several well-carefully planned steps to make sure that the data collection is comprehensive and reliable. The researcher initially used purposive sampling in selecting the participants who met the inclusion criteria of the study; however, due to the limited number of eligible participants, the researcher used the snowballing method where the eligible participants were referred by another participant.

Potential participants were invited using Facebook messenger and/or mobile phone numbers followed by informed consent that was sent to their email address after their confirmation. The interviews were scheduled and conducted at the interviewee's convenience depending on the comfort of the interviewee and their location. One participant was interviewed in person, three participants were interviewed via Zoom, and the rest of the participants were interviewed via Facebook messenger. The interviews were audio recorded which lasted for 30 to 45 minutes and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and authenticity in capturing participants' experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) with all participants being asked for their consent prior to recording the interview. A semi-structured interview guide, validated by research experts before the implementation was used to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for follow-up questions. Pseudonyms were used in the transcripts as part of keeping the participants' identities confidential. To further protect the participants' privacy, the recorded files were stored in secure and password protected files.

During the data collection process, one challenge was encountered, particularly in conducting online interviews. The main issue was the poor internet connectivity, which occasionally disrupted the flow of conversations. One interview had to be repeated to ensure that all questions were thoroughly addressed. Despite this challenge, measures were taken to ensure that all interviews were successfully completed, maintaining the depth and quality of the responses.

Post Data Gathering. In this stage, the researcher meticulously handled and processed the collected data. The audio recordings were transcribed, and these transcriptions were stored in secure, password-protected files labeled 'transcriptions.' To prevent data loss, the files were also backed up on a physical storage or external drive. Using the transcripts, the researcher manually highlighted important words or phrases for coding and categorized them into themes and sub-themes. To ensure the participants' confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher deleted and anonymized personal identifiers in the transcripts. Furthermore, the researcher summarized and consolidated the sub-themes and themes in excel to facilitate interpretation.

The researcher read and reviewed the transcripts multiple times for accuracy and completeness, cross-checking responses by comparing them with the audio recordings to avoid misinterpretations and address any missing or unclear responses. To give each participant a chance to review their transcripts, the researcher sent out an email containing their transcripts to ensure their responses were correctly recorded. Upon completing the data analysis, the recorded files were permanently deleted from the secure storage including the physical storage or external drive to uphold ethical research standards and maintain participant confidentiality. The transcripts were securely stored in a password-protected digital file, accessible only to the researcher. Any printed copies were shredded and thrown away after analysis to ensure data security.

Data Analysis

This study used Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method of phenomenological data analysis to ensure a rigorous and structured approach in highlighting the lived experiences of the participants after completing their J-1 program. The researcher determined that thematic saturation had been reached and, therefore, transcribed 12 out of 15 audio recordings from the interview participants.

To analyze qualitative research transcripts, the researcher began by reading each transcript multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the overall content. Next, extracted significant statements related to the phenomenon being studied from each transcript, recording these statements on an excel file. From these significant statements, the researcher formulated meaningful interpretations. Organize the formulated meanings into categories, sub-themes, and themes. The researcher then integrated the study's findings into a thorough description of the phenomenon under investigation and described the fundamental structure of the phenomenon. Lastly, the researcher sought validation of the findings from the research participants to align the researcher's descriptive results with their personal experiences.

Step One: Familiarization. The researcher thoroughly read and re-read the transcripts of interviews conducted with the J-1 mathematics teachers who have returned to their home countries. This step aims to obtain a general sense of the content by reading the transcripts multiple times and to immerse the researcher in the participants' experiences, gaining a deep understanding of their re-entry challenges, professional reintegration, and personal adjustments.

Step Two: Extracting Significant Statements. From the transcripts, the researcher identified, extracted, and recorded key statements made by the participants reflecting their lived experiences upon returning home. These significant statements include expressions of challenges in adapting their international skills learned to their local educational system.

Step Three: Formulating Meanings. The researcher then interpreted the significant statements to derive the underlying meanings. For example, a teacher's statement about feeling “disconnected” from the local teaching community might be interpreted as a sense of professional isolation upon returning. These meanings will reflect the participants' core experiences and emotional responses during their transition period.

Step Four: Organizing into Clusters of Themes. The formulated meanings were organized into clusters of themes that represent common patterns or categories across the participants' experiences. For this study, the researcher came up with five different themes: motivations for global teaching, professional and cultural re-entry, professional identity and teaching practices after the program, professional and interpersonal relationships and reintegration process and policies.

Step Five: Describing the Phenomenon. Based on the thematic analysis, the researcher integrated the findings to write a comprehensive description of the experiences of returning J-1 mathematics teachers. This description includes detailed accounts of the personal, cultural, and professional challenges they faced, their adaptation strategies, and the influence of their international teaching experience on their career development.

Step six: Producing the Fundamental Structure. The exhaustive description was then refined to highlight the essential structure of the phenomenon. In this case, the core experiences of J-1 mathematics teachers returning to their home countries were extracted into a fundamental understanding of how international exposure has shaped their teaching practices, professional identities, and reintegration experiences.

Step Seven: Validation or Member Checking. To validate the findings, the researcher communicated to the participants via messenger and email to confirm whether the descriptions and interpretations accurately reflect their experiences to ensure that the analysis resonates with the participants' perspectives and maintains the authenticity of their lived experiences.

After multiple reviews and cross-checking of the transcripts, the researcher highlighted manually important words or phrases and came up with five different themes with 15 different sub-themes. These are as follows:

Theme 1: Career Advancement and Professional Development

- 1.1 Professional growth and Career Advancement
- 1.2 Exposure to Diverse Culture and Environment
- 1.3 Skills Development and Innovation in Teaching
- 1.4 Financial Freedom

Theme 2: Professional Identity and Teaching Practices after the Program

- 2.1 Adoption of New or Blended Methods
- 2.2 Long-term Career Impact

Theme 3: Professional and Interpersonal Relationships

- 3.1 Relationships with colleagues, students and administrators
- 3.2 Support systems (personal and professional)

Theme 4: Reintegration Process and Policies Adoption

- 4.1 Professional Recognition
- 4.2 Continued Professional Development
- 4.3 Reintegration Expectations

Theme 5: Professional and Cultural Re-entry Challenges

- 5.1 Cultural re-adaptation challenges
- 5.2 Professional re-entry challenge
- 5.3 Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock
- 5.4 Coping mechanisms

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki. It has been approved following the protocol of the Research and Ethics Committee of the University of the Visayas with Reference No. 2024-479 dated November 22, 2024. The research involved adults participating voluntarily in a semi-structured interview. Before the conduction of the interview, an accompanying cover letter explained the confidentiality and purpose of the study, the potential objectives, and the voluntary participation. Transportation

cost and snacks were provided for participating in the study. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Results and Discussion

This section detailed the main findings from the participants' responses, analyzed with Colaizzi's (1978) method. The results were categorized into five major themes and 15 different sub-themes, highlighting the lived experiences of the participants as they reintegrated professionally. Through this analysis, this study sought to deepen the understanding of their motivations, adaptation strategies, professional identity transformation, and the broader impacts of their international teaching experience.

Profile of the Participants

The findings offer an in-depth depiction of the lived experiences of the teachers who have completed a cultural exchange program. The profile of the participants shown in table 2 consists of six males and six females coming from the diverse geographical locations within the province of Cebu. Hence, this represents varied perspective on the re-entry experiences being from different places, offering insights into both urban and rural reintegration challenges.

Table 2. *Profile of the Participants*

Name	Gender	No. of Years Teaching in the US	No. of Years Teaching in the Philippines after the Program	Address	Grade Level handled
Judy	Female	5	1 yr & 5 months	Naga	Elem Math
Chris	Male	5	1 yr & 5 months	Cebu City	HS Math
Simon	Male	5	1 yr & 5 months	Talisay	Elem Math
Justine	Male	4.5	1 yr & 5 months	Talisay	Science & Math
Karen	Female	5	1 yr & 5 months	Liloan	Elem Math/SH-Math
Louisa	Female	4.5	1 yr & 5 months	Naga	MS Eng & Math
Jane	Female	4	1 yr & 5 months	Minglanilla	SPED math
Mary	Female	5	2 yrs & 5 months	Minglanilla	Math
Jamie	Male	3	2 yrs & 5 months	Bantayan Island	HS Math
Juana	Female	5	1 yr & 5 months	Cebu City	Elem Math
Carter	Male	5	1 yr & 5 months	Balamban	SPED math
Mark	Male	5	1 yr & 5 months	Cebu City	Elem Math

To shed light on various aspects of their professional and personal transitions, the researcher arrived at five main themes namely: Career Advancement and Professional Development, Professional Identity and Teaching Practices after the Program, Professional and Interpersonal Relationships, Reintegration Process and Policies Adoption, and Professional and Cultural Re-entry Challenges. These themes highlighted the challenges and opportunities that shape the participants' re-entry experiences.

Theme 1: Career Advancement and Professional Development

The researcher explores the participants' motivation for joining the J-1 program, bringing light to its substantial influence on their lived experiences. Significantly, about 67% of the participants identified professional growth as their primary driving factor, illustrating the program's appeal as a means for enhancing their skills.

Judy expressed her passion for global education as the key reason for joining the J-1 program because of its unique opportunity to collaborate with international educators. Through the interviews, the participants highlighted professional development focusing on career improvement, professional growth, new culture and environment, and financial freedom. The aspiration to connect with the educators of other cultures and learn the different teaching approaches resonates with them to enhance their teaching practices and broaden their horizons. Thus, according to Harrison (2018), educators are often motivated by the opportunity to exchange knowledge and practice with peers from different countries. In the teaching context, teacher motivation can be described as the "willingness, drive, or desire to engage in effective teaching" as reinforces by Suryani et al., (2020) in his study about relationships between teaching motivation and teaching behavior of education teachers.

"Ang nakamotivate nako to participate in the J1 program, kanang rooted gyud akong passion for global education. So, kana nga program man gud ang J1 sikat kay na diri sa Dumaguete because it offers unique opportunity to collaborate with international educators so mao na ang akong tuyo. Kanang maka collaborate with international educators mao gyud na ang number 1. Ikaduha, kanang ma enhance ang akong teaching strategies, kanang ma expose ko sa students with diverse personalities."

(What motivated me to participate in the J1 program is that my passion for global education is deeply rooted. The J1 program is well-known here in Dumaguete because it offers a unique opportunity to collaborate with international educators, and that was my primary goal. Collaborating with international educators was my top priority. Secondly, I wanted to enhance my teaching strategies and be exposed to students with diverse personalities.) (Judy)

Similarly, Chris and Jamie also mentioned improving oneself professionally and leveling up their career as a teacher. They focused on personal growth and enhancing their skills. They also mentioned trying a new curriculum and teaching setup be helpful in advancing their career. Previous studies show that international teaching programs also tend to be used as an avenue for teachers to sharpen their

expertise and adopt new approaches to teaching (McGrath, 2019; Smith & Green, 2021).

“My first motivation is the opportunity to improve myself professionally and then next is to have the opportunity to experience American culture and then new environment and then new place set up for teaching.” (Chris)

“It was a career improvement like I wanted to level up my career as a teacher. I wanted to learn new things from the first world country.” (Jamie)

Furthermore, participants were motivated by the opportunity for economic freedom as stated by Mark.

“To have a financial freedom and for professional growth” (Mark)

The researcher explored how their motivations might affect their expectations during their reintegration to their home country. The study's findings suggest the J1 program has significantly impacted the professional growth and teaching practices of the participating mathematics teachers as it has been rooted in them as their primary motivational aspects. Additionally, through the J1 program, the teachers sought to develop their teaching strategies, grow professionally, gain exposure to diverse cultures, and be financially free.

Theme 2: Professional Identity and Teaching Practices after the Program

Sub-Theme 2.1: Adoption of New or Blended Methods. During the interview, the participants were asked what strategies they have adopted to blend with their learned methodology to the existing approach in their current teaching. The results show that most participants use the “I do, We do, You do strategy”. It is often known as the Gradual Release of Responsibility with three stages according to Benjamin, Z. (2023). These stages are modeling (I Do), scaffolding (We Do), and independent practice (You Do). The responses below present the participants use this strategy. Jamie and Juana incorporate scaffolding strategy in their teaching to support student learning while Louisa utilizes modeling to demonstrate and guide the learning process.

“I also applied the I do, We do, You do strategy and scaffold them with mathematics steps. I do this in a class set up not as small group set up.” (Chris)

“Ang strategy nako kay sped man akong gidala mam, kanang modeling. Modeling ra jud to mam ang akong mabuhat ato nila and then kanang I do, We do, You do. Mao sad na akong gishare sa akong mga kauban nga teachers diri.”

(My strategy, since I handled SPED, was modeling. Modeling was really what I could do with them, and then the 'I Do, We Do, You Do' approach. That's also what I shared with my fellow teachers here.) (Louisa)

Daun kanang I do, We do, You do strategy, gigamit nako na perme.”

(And then the 'I Do, We Do, You Do' strategy, I used it all the time) (Mary)

“I'm still using discovery method but with a little touch of the I do, We do, You do strategy.” (Jamie)

“Kanang I do, We do, You do ra gihapon, naa ra gihapon na with independent practice sa mga bata, sila na ang mu try if nakakuha ba sila.”

(The I Do, We Do, You Do strategy still includes independent practice for the students, where they try on their own to see if they've understood.) (Juana)

Chris and Jamie also mentioned using small groups in their teaching. This indicates that both teachers have continued to value and implement small group instruction, recognizing its effectiveness in addressing varied learning needs.

“The lingering strategy that I have applied right now is like more on the small group set up that kids learn at their own pace. (Chris)

“In the Philippines, I used to do scaffolding, I really like deductive method, but I do not use it all the time. I use it for integrating like I am still using groupings, small group.” (Jamie)

To enhance the teaching and learning process, Simon, Justine and Mary utilized the use of technology as a means of innovative strategies.

“I make sure to have the proper use of technology to blend sa lesson ba na hindi siya magta take ng time either gamitin siya at the beginning or at the end of the class.”

(I make sure to use technology appropriately, blending it into the lesson without taking too much time, whether it's used at the beginning or the end of the class.) (Simon)

“Setting rules and expectations are important. Also using multimedia activities, do not just stick to one website, I blend various like quizziz, and Kahoot.” (Justine)

“I shared the resources nga naa nako like katong mugamit mi og quizziz, Kahoot, mao nay among gipanggamit.” (“I shared the resources I had, such as using Quizizz and Kahoot. Those were the tools we utilized) (Mary)

Furthermore, Mary believed that using Good News or Good things are the best motivations to have at the beginning of the class. This approach fostered an encouraging and supportive learning environment while reinforcing prior knowledge if followed by a recap.

“Daun the best motivation na akong nagamit is ‘Good News’ or ‘Good things’ like how are you? Ana followed by a ten-minute recap.”

(The best motivational strategy I used was ‘Good News’ or ‘Good Things,’ where I’d ask questions like, ‘How are you?’ This was then followed by a ten-minute recap.) (Mary)

Another teaching strategies incorporated into teaching after the program are the collaborative strategy and STADS. The participants shared how their teaching strategies seamlessly adapted between the US and the local educational context.

“Ang akong gigamit diri sa Philippines kaning collaborative strategy and STADS nya ma oni akong giapply pud, gigamit nako didto sa US nya applicable pud kay pareha man gud siya og approach sa collaborative sa Kagan ang STADS.”

(What I use here in the Philippines is the collaborative strategy and STADS, and this is what I also applied and used in the US. It was also applicable there because it has a similar approach to Kagan’s collaborative strategy and STADS.) (Judy)

Simon also highlighted the importance of fostering active engagement and collaboration among students during the lesson discussion with student discourse. As expressed by the participant, the students were more engaged and actively involved in the lesson. This approach not only encouraged critical thinking and deeper understanding but also created a safe learning environment where students felt empowered to express themselves.

“And then ang paggamit ng student discourse in the middle ng teaching. I think effective siya kasi mas na engage ang mga estudyante.”

Additionally, I incorporate student discourse in the middle of the teaching process. I think it is effective because the students were more engaged. (Simon)

Karen shared how they adapted their teaching strategies to fit in the local educational settings. As expressed, the participants utilized the Kagan strategies learned from the US such as Think-Pair Share and Mix-Pair Share. As noted, these methods were easier to use given the different dynamics in the Philippines. Moreover, the participant also incorporated code calling, rephrasing and retelling as a means to check if the students were paying attention in the discussion. Thus, these strategies help keep the students engaged as explained.

“I blend kanang Kagan strategies such as think-pair-share, and mix-pair-share. Mao ra ning madali dali kay the kind of settings here in the Philippines is different kesa US. Kana sad ang Code calling and then rephrasing and retelling, mao sad na akong gibuhay nga strategy kay naa baya tay mga grade 12 nga maminaw pero wa d.i diri, wa didto.”

(I blend Kagan strategies such as think-pair-share and mix-pair-share. These are the ones I find easier to implement because the settings here in the Philippines are very different from those in the US. I also use code calling, rephrasing and retelling as strategies because we have Grade 12 students who seem to be listening but aren’t mentally present.) (Karen)

Carter also blended an explicit approach in teaching where students were given various activities and made sure the learners knew the foundation necessary to arrive at the correct answer. This approach is evidence-based, characterized by a sequence of carefully designed activities with practice and evaluation that supports the learners through the learning process (Archer et al, 2011). Additionally, Karen chunked the lessons into small activities, so the learners understand that the small activities they do lead to a bigger picture. Hence, chunking or dividing the lesson into bits of information is a significant part of the scaffolding strategy (Hitt & Smith, 2017). which is similar to the response of Jamie above.

“Number one sigurong Explicit teaching na mostly dili lang ka muhatag nila og answers, most of the time kay mag activities mig daghan. the way nagtudlo og math nga muhatag ko nila og example pero dili ko muhata deritso og answer, but we have to make sure kahibawo sila sa process og sa foundation nganong na lead mi ana nga number ba. at least ang bata kay ma build up ang ilang creative thinking ba. Ing ana siya, gi chunking nako ba in a way nga kahibawo sila nga kanang gagmay nga activities nga among pagabuhayon leading na to the bigger picture. Murag Discovery Method kung baka.”

(Probably number one is Explicit Teaching, where you don’t just give them the answers. Most of the time, we engage in a lot of activities. When teaching math, I provide them with examples but don’t give the answer outright. Instead, we ensure they understand the process and the foundation of how we arrived at that number. At least this way, the students’ creative thinking is developed. It’s like chunking the lessons so that they understand that the small activities we do are leading toward the bigger picture. It’s somewhat like the Discovery Method.) (Carter)

Lastly, Mark mentioned about another Kagan strategies such as RallyCoach, RallyRobin, RoundRobin, Inside-Outside Circle, and Instant Stars. These strategies encourage active participation and collaboration among students and were noted as effective as expressed below.

“One of the most effective Kagan structures for math is the rally coach. And we can also do rally robin, round robin, inside outside circle, and instant stars.” (Mark)

Sub-Theme 2.2: Long-term Career Impact. The J1 program had a significant impact on the participants' identity as a mathematics teacher such as being appreciative for diverse educational practices, being adaptable to a more holistic approach. It also made them more reinforced, more resourceful, more patient, passionate, more professional. Furthermore, it influenced the participant's sense of authority and relationship building.

"It impacted my identity as a mathematics teacher by enhancing my appreciation for diverse educational practices. So magsige kog kadungog anang diverse nga word if gikan ka sa America. Para sa ako, it helps me to adapt a more holistic approach focusing on student engagement. And then, bahin sa teaching philosophy it shifted toward the cultural relevance and inclusivity kana, then kana pong mag interpret sa project-based nga learning and collaboration in Mathematics."

(It impacted my identity as a mathematics teacher by enhancing my appreciation for diverse educational practices. I often hear the word 'diverse' when coming from America. For me, it helps me adapt to a more holistic approach, focusing on student engagement. And then, regarding my teaching philosophy, it shifted toward cultural relevance and inclusivity, as well as incorporating project-based learning and collaboration in Mathematics) (Judy)

Furthermore, Judy mentioned being more adaptable as a positive impact acquired during the program. The participant highlighted a trans-formative journey where the prior skills and knowledge acquired gained in the Philippines were significantly widened through the program and exposure to the education system abroad. Adaptability, growth, and the ability to make lessons relatable to students demonstrated the participant's personal and professional growth. Related studies have shown that adaptability is important and highly relevant to teachers as teaching requires managing and responding to the constant change (Collie & Martin, 2015)

"Kani nga experience nako it made more adaptable, Naa jud siyay positive impact because ang imo ganing mga na learn and na acquire before nga naa paka sa Pilipinas, feeling nimo daghan na pero when you go to the US didto pud ka makakita og daghan pang mga real meaning og unsa ang K-12, unsaon paghimo ang lessons nga relatable gyud sa bata"

(This experience made me more adaptable. It really had a positive impact because the things I learned and acquired before, when I was still in the Philippines, felt like a lot. But when I went to the U.S., I realized there was so much more to learn—the real meaning of K-12 education and how to create lessons that are truly relatable to students.) (Judy)

Another response provided meaningful findings into the personal and professional growth of the participant. Chris expressed about the reinforcement of the teaching philosophy that the prior knowledge and skills gained was not changed but rather strengthened during the program. The challenges faced during the program have solidified the belief of the importance of being a learner centered. Moreover, the participant also mentioned being objective in teaching. This includes asking critical questions such as "What I'm supposed to be doing? ... so I have to plan my lessons.". This implies the reflective trait of the participant to have effective teaching and make the learning meaningful. Furthermore, this demonstrated the trans-formative power of the J1 program also known as the Culture

"I think it's not about the change, but rather it was more reinforced because my teaching philosophy is just there with the kids as much as possible and try your best for them. And it was more reinforced when I was in the US because kids are more challenging. When it comes to mathematics. I think the most evident long-term impact that I've had during my J1 Experience for five years is the idea of being objective. What I'm supposed to be doing? Like why am I hitting the standards? Am I hitting the target that I need to have within this day, so I have to plan my lessons, and I have to cater whatever student response? Regarding that question, did I hit my target? So that's what I think is the long-term impact long term impact that I have." (Chris)

Simon expressed the idea of manipulative as an important part in Math instruction that students who are fluent in math still need to use manipulative to build a strong skills foundation of the subject. Additionally, the experience abroad during the program had influenced the participant to understand the importance of letting the students interact with the physical models and representations even for advance learners.

"Na influenced siya in a positive way kasi ang na learn ko sa US dun sa school ko is ang mga studyante sa elem sa foundational need nila ng manipulatives all the time, all year kahit pa sabihin na fluent na sila sa fluency ng math, kelangan pa rin nila ng manipulatives kasi dati ang ano ko dito sa Pinas, di na kailangan ng manipulatives, pero ngayon na feel ko na ahh kelangan pa rin nila makita baka kailanganin ba? mas ni grow pa as a teacher, mas na broaden yong horizon mo, mas naging marami ung skills mo ba to teach after ng program."

(It influenced me in a positive way because what I learned in the U.S., specifically at my school, there are elementary students who have a foundational need for manipulative all the time, throughout the year. Even if they are already fluent in math, they still need manipulative. Back then, here in the Philippines, I thought manipulative were no longer necessary. But now I realize, "Ah, they still need to see them; they might really need them. I grew more as a teacher, my horizons broadened, and I gained more skills for teaching after the program.) (Simon)

Justine, Mark, Karen, and Mary acknowledged being more patient, more resourceful and professional as the long-term impacts of the program. These traits and growth suggest that the participant has adapted to handle challenges with greater composure, showcased the ability to think creatively and improved planning, classroom management and responsiveness to foster a more supportive learning

environment.

“Mas nitaas juda ng pasensya. I think I am more resourceful na after kay kailangan jud mangitag pamaagi kay ang mga studyante dali ra kaayo ma bored. I think I have become more professional.”

(My patience has greatly increased. I think I have become more resourceful because I really need to find ways since the students get bored very easily. I think I have become more professional.) (Justine)

“It builds in me the patience, it builds in me the positive side, like the student-centered side. So, I think I'm gonna continue to do this one on my entire career. Yes, it changed me as a person. It made me stronger as a teacher and as a person, it helped me to master my craft even more.” (Mark)

“It has a long-term impact because the experience itself speaks. Daghan kag makuha. Mao na siya ang core memory nako nga aside sa experience aside sa unas natudlo, unsa imong nakuha out of it. I'm enjoying every bit of my stay as a J1 teacher.”

(It has a long-term impact because the experience itself speaks. You gain a lot from it. That became my core memory—not just the teaching experience itself, but also what I learned from it. I enjoyed every bit of my stay as a J-1 teacher.) (Karen)

“Ang long-term impact is wala ko nahadlok nga mu try og new activities mga experiments, new pedagogies, different strategies. Mao na akong ganahan kay ni seek og ganahan pa gihapon ko makat-on ba, kanang motivated jud kaayo ko. Di ko makatuo nga maestrahon jud ko noh, makaingon ko nga passionate jud ko sa akong trabaho. Di sad ko maka ingon og seasoned, makaingon siguro ko nga I'm an experienced teacher kay I know nga daghan pa kaayo kog makat onan. “

(The long-term impact is that I am no longer afraid to try new activities, experiments, new pedagogues, and different strategies. That is what I like because I am constantly seeking and eager to learn. I feel very motivated. I ca not believe I have truly become a teacher. I can say that I am passionate about my work. I would not call myself seasoned, but I would say that I am an experienced teacher because I know there's still so much more for me to learn.) (Mary)

“I would say improved. Na improve akong teaching practices, naa lang siguro slight changes like kanang maningkamot ko nga dili nako mubalik sa traditional nga nana jud koy touch of technology kay every kids man gud kay naa na man gud cellphone, nya karon kay ang cellphone amo jud e collect kay disruption naman jud siya sa classroom ba. One thing aside sa patience, second is professionally, maka improve siya. Ni grow jud ko professionally. Usa kay I don't stick teach ra baya paper pencil lecture, but when I taught in America kay ni widen na or varied na akong activities ba. Mu venture ko og different activities dili lang paper, pwede d.i ko mag groupings, pwede d.i ko mag duwa duwa. I used with the white board, or magpadala ko mga whiteboard sa mga bata og marker para lang naa mi mga quiz quiz gamay mga contest ba karon. So kana, professionally gyud na confident nako na ako ni suwayan kay na learn na ni nako.”

(“I would say improved. My teaching practices have improved, with slight changes, like trying not to return to traditional methods and ensuring there's always a touch of technology. Nowadays, every kid has a cellphone, but now we collect their phones because they have become a disruption in the classroom. Aside from patience, I would say professionally, it has helped me improve. I have really grown professionally. One example is that I do not just stick to paper-pencil lectures anymore. When I taught in America, my activities became more varied. I ventured into different activities, not just paper-based ones. I realized I could do groupings or even incorporate games. I started using whiteboards or providing the students with mini-whiteboards and markers for small quizzes or contests. So, professionally, I have gained confidence to try these approaches because I have learned them.) (Mary)

Jamie reflected a change in perspective acknowledging confidence in their expertise and adapted the value of diverse teaching strategies from various cultures. This implied the importance of collaboration and exposure to diverse perspectives in education.

“It influences my sense of authority. OK, so before I thought like I was, I was really Good. I was really good with the mathematics concept like I thought I learned everything from school but when I was there already in the USA especially, I have some Indian colleagues I have some African colleagues, Mexican colleagues and the American colleague. They also have their teaching style, which I adapted” (Jamie)

Another trans-formative impact of the program was the importance of building rapport with the students. Carter recognized that understanding where the students came from and recognizing their experiences were important to foster a more empathetic and supportive learning environment.

“Dako kaayo, kana Lang number one sa sa relationship building sa studyante kay usa gyud sa akong maingon gyud kay first time nako naka suway ba nga kanang nga kinahanglan gyud ka mutry og understand kung asa sila gikan, mu build relationship.”

(It is very significant, especially in building relationships with students. One thing I can really say is that it was my first time experiencing the need to genuinely try to understand where they are coming from and build a relationship with them) (Carter)

Lastly, aside from the personal and professional growth achieved during the experience, Simon talked about being able to pay off debts.

“Siguro ang masabi ko Lang is mas ni grow ka as a teacher then financially, nabayaran mo utang mo”

(You grow as a teacher, and financially, you can pay off your debts.) (Simon)

The long-term impact of the participants illustrates how professional opportunities such as J1 program or the Exchange Visitor program can have far-reaching influences, improving both personal and professional aspects.

Theme 3: Professional and Interpersonal Relationships

Returning to their local education system following the J-1 program, the participants not only made professional adjustments but also their interpersonal relationships were impacted. The experiences of rejoining the school system determined their relationships with fellow educators and students and administrators while shaping their positions in the educational community. After their international teaching experience returning teachers demonstrated how to manage professional relationships while creating support systems and adapting to their workplace and social circle dynamics.

Sub-Theme 3.1: Relationships with Colleagues after the Program. In this sub-theme, the participants were asked if their experiences abroad affected their relationships with colleagues, students, or administrators when they returned. The majority of the participants expressed their relationships with colleagues and friends stayed the same with no significant changes. The statements below reflected a sense of emotional consistency and comfort in relationships with friends and colleagues. Thus, this underscored the value of trust and shared history despite personal growth and changes in life experiences.

“wala kay ganahan sila maminaw nimo”

(None because they want to listen to you) (Judy)

“Basically no. All I know is that they’re just like proud of me.” (Mark)

“Sa akin, sa mga close friends ko, colleagues, wala na man, same old lang.”

(For me, with my close friends and colleagues, nothing has really changed. It is just the same as before.) (Simon)

“I think mao ra gihapon and the usual impression is still there pero I think naa lang siguro like murag lahi silag tan-aw ba like Oi, gikan ra ba ni siya og US, not necessary like grabe jud kaayo ang taas kay they know me nga langas ana ba pero they listen to my opinion more kay naa nay US experience.”

(I think it’s still the same, and the usual impression is still there. But I think there’s a slight difference, like they see me differently now—like, ‘Oh, this person came from the US.’ It’s not necessarily an overwhelming change because they know me as talkative and outgoing. However, they listen to my opinions more because I now have US experience.) (Justine)

“Actually, wala ra man nuon kay kini ang naa sa admins, akong mga colleagues, okay ra man. With the rest of the teachers, mga bag o sad nga wala ko kaila so they look at you in a different way.”

(Actually, nothing much has changed with the administrators and my colleagues; everything is okay with them. But with the rest of the teachers, especially the new ones I don’t know, they seem to look at me differently.) (Karen)

“Wala ra man. Okay ra.”

(Nothing much. It is okay) (Jane)

“murag wala man mam. The same ra.”

(It seems like nothing has changed, ma’am. It’s the same) (Juana)

“Wala man pero maka ingon kog daghan silag gusto ipangutana, unsa ako ma share abouts unsa akong expectations sa mga studyante namo og sa difference sa mga studyante nato sa US.”

(Nothing really, but I can say that they have a lot of questions they want to ask, what I can share about my expectations for our students and the difference between our students and those in the US.) (Carter)

The excerpt below from Mary touches on the social dynamics that often arise when someone returns from a foreign experience, especially being away for a long time in this case. While the relationships between friends and colleagues did not change, the emotional dynamics shifted as the participant was labeled based on financial assumptions. Additionally, Jamie reflected on how others were treating them differently, possibly with more respect.

“Our relationships did not change kay they are very close to me but their impressions of me changes. Kay ilang impression to me is daghan na kaayo kog kwarta. Kana ra gyud. I mean, murag ilang impressions kay di ko mahutdan og kwarta. Kana ganing mag expect sila na akoy muamot ani, kana gani.”

(Our relationships did not change because they are very close to me, but their impressions of me have changed. Their impression is that I now have a lot of money. That’s it. I mean, it is like they think I will never run out of money, and they start expecting that I will contribute or chip in for things.) (Mary)

"I think that they're treating me like higher maybe because I have an experience abroad." (Jamie)

Chris and Louisa also acknowledged the difference in expectations and expressed how their habits and mannerisms have changed unconsciously. Participant 2 speaks how people held to a higher standard based on experiences.

"They expect you to be more professional" (Chris)

"Ma feel nako mam na taas kay silag expectations nato noh, kay gikan kuno ta sa US, lahi na gyud. Maka ana sila na hoy lahia na gud nimo, nya naa sad ko manerism, unknowingly mam, dili ko conscious na kana bitawng maka yeah yea yeah, hoy yea yeah ka diha...pero expressions ra na siya mam ba, unconscious lang nako ba masulti nako, mu ingon na lang jud ko, oi sorry jud kaayo. kanang mubo ra man ng 5 years mam kung buot hunahunaon pero maka adapt jud ka"

(I feel they have higher expectations of us because we came from the US, and we are really different now. They might say, 'Wow, you are really different now,' and I also have some mannerisms, unknowingly, ma'am. I am not conscious of it, like saying 'yeah, yeah, yeah,' or 'hey, yeah, yeah,' but those are just expressions, ma'am. It is unconscious for me to say those things. I will just say, 'Oh, I am really sorry.' Five years may seem short, ma'am, but you can really adapt.) (Louisa)

Sub-Theme 3.2: Support Systems (Personal and Professional). In this part, the participants were asked whether they had access to personal and professional support from the community upon their return. The researcher aimed to explore the availability and impact of such support systems in their reintegration process in both personal and professional environments.

Across the participants, personal support from family and friends appeared to be a consistent source of support. Both Simon and Louisa expressed the presence of family and friends with sufficient support from the former colleagues and educational leaders. These experiences demonstrate the importance of fostering collaborative and inclusive professional cultures. On the other hand, Justine mentioned that while family support was present, but felt lack of professional support which led to the feeling of inadequacy in their professional environment.

"Sa personal, supported naman kasi may family and friends. Sa professional support naman, I guess Oo kasi nung alam nil ana pauwi na ba, nag invite sila na to go back sa division, mag bisita sa district na they are willing to learn ba to listen kung ano ung mga e share mo."

(Personally, I feel supported because of my family and friends. Professionally, I guess yes, because when they knew I was coming back, they invited me to return to the division, visit the district, and showed that they were willing to learn and listen to whatever I could share.) (Simon)

"More on sa family ra siguro. Sa professional support, wala ra. did not feel adequately supported upon your re-entry."

(Maybe more on family support only. As for professional support, there was none. I did not feel adequately supported upon my re-entry.) (Justine)

"Ang akola sa Pilipinas mam kay very supportive kaayo ko. Ang last nako sa Pilipinas kay Bulacao Community School. Supportive kay sila and then mura mig family gyud helping each other. In terms sa colleague, walay problema mam, in terms sa students buotan ra gyud kaayo mam."

(For me, in the Philippines, ma'am, I was very supported. My last school in the Philippines was Bulacao Community School. They were very supportive, and we were like a family, really helping each other. In terms of colleagues, there were no issues, ma'am, and in terms of students, they were really very well-behaved, ma'am.) (Louisa)

Mary also spoke about the strong personal support from their principal, who has been a consistent mentor since their student days. On the other hand, both Mary and Jamie expressed their frustrations with the lack of government support. Mary noted that the government had no awareness of their return which has been confirmed by Jamie that there were no government led programs to welcome and support J-1 returnees. This result highlighted the gap in the system for returning teachers of the J1 program for which mission is to foster cultural and educational exchange.

"Oo, kay diri sa akong principal is very supportive jud kaayo nako eversince pa. studyante pa jud ko niya before nya na maestra ko niya. When it comes to the government, they don't know about me. Wala jud silay clue. I don't think so na the government have supported me in such gani sa community, siguro kuan lang, kanang Oi, nibalik na among teacher sauna."

(Yes, because my principal here has been very supportive of me ever since. I was even her student before, and now I am her teacher. When it comes to the government, they don't know about me. They have no clue. I don't think the government has supported me in any way. As for the community, maybe it's just like, 'Oh, our former teacher has returned.) (Mary)

"Nothing at all. Like I don't see any programs from the government like welcoming those who just finished their J1 program." (Jamie)

Carter expressed personal support from a former classmate who was already at the school and highlighted the help received in navigating the school's systems and adapting to local practices. Moreover, Carter mentioned limited resources, which often hinder the realization of new ideas. This experience reflected the challenges that teachers face when trying to implement innovative teaching

practices.

“Oo. Mostly ang personal support ra gyud ang akong makuan kay ang maingon siguro nako kay naa man koy kaila nga naa didto sa skwelahan. Usa sa akong maingon nga nakatabang sad nako ba nga dili ko mabag ohan kay ang kaila nako nga naa na didto sa skwelahan daan classmate nako sauna ba nya usa siya sa mga nakatabang nako nga mao ni among system diri. Supportive in a way nga maminaw sila sa imong ideas og sa imohang gusto mahitabo, suggestions ang problema lang nila kay limited ang resources nya at the same time mag agad pa pud sila sa tag iya sa school. Mao ng most of the time di gyud siya ma materialize ba.”

(Yes. Mostly, it is really just personal support that I can count on. I guess I can say that I had someone I knew at the school, which helped me a lot in adjusting. One of the things that helped me was having a classmate from before who was already there at the school. They were one of those who guided me on how the system works here. They were supportive in a way because they listened to my ideas and what I wanted to achieve, as well as my suggestions. The only problem is that resources are limited, and at the same time, they still need approval from the school owner. That's why, most of the time, things don't materialize.) (Carter)

While other participants felt supported during their re-entry, Mark expressed deep disappointment, noting that neither the community nor the government offered any support for re-employment.

“Sadly, there's none. So, there is no support from the community available, no support from the government that is available. So, they did not provide us with any support for re-employment or any way to share what we learned. So, this is like not related to the purpose of the J-1 program which is to promote cultural and educational exchange between the US and Philippines, but we are not given the chance like to share what we learned. So, we learned a lot. We have many things to share. But The thing is where?” (Mark)

Chris shed light on the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic which affected not only the education system but also the reintegration of the returnee teachers. The stigma described by this participant is concerning and underscores the importance of addressing the misconceptions about J1 program.

“Number one, it was like a unique setup because of COVID, when I returned, I was expecting to be returned back to my previous school, but unfortunately, the COVID pandemic teaching loads and also teaching positions were minimized. Therefore, I was not able to go back to my previous school, so I applied to other schools. And then they have this stigma wherein if you are a J1 teacher, the expectation is that you come back to the US. That's the expectation that they have, which is not true.” (Chris)

Theme 4: Reintegration Process and Policies Adoption

When transitioning back to the local education system after the J-1 program, participants had to navigate both reintegration policies and expectations. The reintegration into the Philippine education system involves navigating various policies and programs designed to support their professional transition. One initiative is the ‘Balik-Turo Program’, also known as ‘Sa ‘Pinas Ikaw ang Ma’am at Sir’ (SPIMS), initiated by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). This is one of the reintegration programs for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) who passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) so that they can go back to the Philippines and work as teachers in Philippine public schools (How to Apply SPIMS Program - Sa Pinas Ikaw Ang Ma’am at Sir | OWWA Member, n.d.). This program’s intention is to facilitate the Filipino educators who return to the country after working abroad by providing employment opportunities in the local education sector. Given this opportunity, the returning teacher can apply on OWWA SPIMS via OWWA office or via e-mail. The following are the steps to do if the applicant wants to apply for the program online: First, fill out the online application form. Second, the teacher then must wait for the SPIMS Team to send a response with the requirements. Third, the teacher applicant must submit the requirements needed via email. Fourth, once accepted, the Team will ask for the school assignment while the teacher applicant chooses the preferred school and lastly, wait for the Notice of School Assignment (NOSCA) to create an ‘item’ assignment.

While this program offers a structured pathway for reintegration, the participants in this study encountered both opportunities and challenges in adapting to reintegration policies, including professional recognition, continued professional development. Their experiences highlight the gaps and strengths of existing policies in facilitating a smooth transition for internationally experienced teachers returning to the Philippine education system.

Sub-Theme 4.1: Professional Recognition. The participants expressed concerns about the lack of professional recognition and support upon returning from the J1 program as noted by participant Chris. Louisa also expressed not feeling a strong sense of cultural exchange during their re-entry.

“I think there's not many opportunities for the J1 teachers so went back to the Philippines to share the learnings during the program. It feels like nothing. There's like, nonexistent support” (Chris)

“Sa akong experience mam noh, di man kaayo nako ma feel ang cultural exchange.”

(In my experience, ma'am, I don't really feel the cultural exchange that much.) (Louisa)

These responses suggested that the participants’ expectations and perceptions about the cultural exchange component of the program were not fully met and may have limited the participants’ ability to fully integrate the new teaching approaches gained during the

program. Furthermore, this highlighted the disconnect between the intended cultural exchange and the actual experiences of these participants.

Sub-Theme 4.2: Continued Professional Development. The participants were asked whether they had heard about the Balik-Turo Program or SPIMS initiative in the Philippines. The utterances of the participants showed that the majority of them heard about the program but chose not to apply, one of them heard it and applied while almost half of them never heard of it.

Judy, Simon, Justine, Karen, Louisa, Jane and Juana stated that they have heard about the Balik-Turo Program of the Philippines, but they chose not to submit an application.

“Oo, pero dili kaayo kuan basta mura ra siyag initiative nga would encourage filipino educators who have international experience to return to the Philippines and share their knowledge and experiences.”

(Yes, but not that much. It just seems like an initiative to encourage Filipino educators with international experience to return to the Philippines and share their knowledge and experiences) (Judy)

“kadungog ko ana but I did not apply”

(I heard about that, but I did not apply) (Justine)

‘Narinig ko yan na sabi nila nung dun pa sa US na pag uwi mo, pag nag apply ka, bigyan ka ng priority sa teacher I.’

(I heard about that when I was still in the U.S. They said that when you return and apply, you’ll be given priority for a Teacher I position.) (Simon)

“I’ve heard of it pero di ko sure. Nakadungog rako ana to someone wala ingon nga sa balita, mga in gana. I just heard ana from someone nga ng mention anang balik turo.”

(I’ve heard of it, but I’m not sure. I just heard about it from someone, not from the news or anything like that. Someone just mentioned the Balik-Turo program to me.) (Karen)

“Yeah. Sa akong friend mam, balik turo. And then ana sila mam, I don’t know if tinuod nga di na daw ta mubalik og ranking? Wla kaayo siya impact kay di man gud ta pangitaan mam noh? Mao na ako mam. Had it been nga gi obliga gyud ka nga kinahanglan mubalik ka before going back naa ka ing ana. Nya wala sad silay support sa amo mam, nganu naghatag sila sa atong paggawas? Wala. Amo sariling sikap. So sa nalan ra gyud nga cultural exchange.”

(Yeah, my friend mentioned the Balik-Turo program, ma’am. And they said, ma’am, I don’t know if it’s true that we wouldn’t have to go through the ranking process anymore? It doesn’t seem to have much impact because they don’t really require us, ma’am, right? That’s how I see it, ma’am. If they had really required us to return and ensured that such a program was in place before we went abroad, it would have been different. But they didn’t provide us with any support, ma’am. Why did they let us go abroad if they weren’t going to help us? None. It’s all on our own efforts. So, it’s just in name as a cultural exchange.) (Louisa)

“Yes mam, I heard it from my friend who was also a J-1 teacher before, but I did not apply” (Jane)

“Ah nakadungog ra ko nga sa DepEd, priority gyud kuno if gikan ka ng J1 e priority gyud kuno ka but muagi pa gihapon ka og ranking. Nya karon kay lately, akong na dunggan kay naa koy kaila musulod na pud unta siyag DepEd, ingon man siya nga pabalikon kuno siyag ranking. Mao ra na akong nadunggan. Maong wala ko ni try.”

(Ah, I just heard that in DepEd, they supposedly prioritize J-1 returnees, but you still have to go through the ranking process. And recently, I heard from someone I know who was about to join DepEd again, but they were told they would have to go through the ranking process again. That’s all I’ve heard, which is why I didn’t try.) (Juana)

One of the significant challenges faced by a participant returning in the Philippine public school system is the prolonged process of obtaining a permanent teaching position, known as being granted an “item”. Mark in this study reported that despite their qualifications and international teaching experience, they encountered bureaucratic obstacles when attempting to re-enter the local education system. The hiring process generally involves multiple steps, including document verification, ranking procedures, and waiting for available positions, which delays their transition to stable employment. This extended timeline poses challenges for returning J-1 teachers who aim for immediate reintegration into the workforce, as they must navigate these administrative requirements before securing a permanent position.

“Sa public man gud dugay dugay paka matagaan og item daghan pa kaayo process mahitabo.”

(In the public school system, it takes a long time to be granted a permanent position because there are many processes to go through.) (Carter)

Additionally, Carter shared that his relative, who is currently teaching in a public school, continuously struggles with financial difficulties due to the late salary releases. As a result, teachers are often forced to take out loans or borrow money just to meet their

daily expenses while waiting for the salaries to be processed and released. These financial difficulties highlight the need for a more efficient and streamlined system to support the returning teachers as they reintegrate into the local education system.

“At the same time inig tudlo pa gyud nimo dugay pa gyud kaayo ang salary nila mao bitaw ng kuan akong ig agaw sa public school, mahurot na lang kuno ang oras sa sigeg utang og loan before daw sila ma swelduan kay usahay ang sweldo dugay musulod.”

(At the same time, even after you start teaching, it takes a long time before you receive your salary. That’s why my cousin, who is teaching in a public school, said that they end up spending most of their time taking out loans and borrowing money while waiting for their salary, as there are times when their pay is delayed.) (Carter)

Mark on the other hand has heard about the Balik-Turo Program and chose to submit an application. However, as noted, the participant’s statement reflected a sense of frustration and disappointment due to the lack of response after applying for the said program. Despite being eager to return to public schools, Mark took the initiative to seek employment in private schools. This demonstrated his motivation to continue to teach and contribute their international expertise to the local educational system.

“Yes, I heard about the program SPIMS and to be honest I applied, I submitted my application online and there is no response from them. So, I followed up but there’s no response. I do not know what happened. I feel so depressed during that time. Because I really wanted to go back to the public schools because I’m very eager to, like help our students but there’s no response from them. So, what I did is I just looked for like private schools to employ me.” (Mark)

Chris, Mary, Jamie and Carter disclosed that they had never heard about the Balik-Turo Program. This reveals a significant gap in awareness about this program which reflects a broader issue of limited dissemination of important information to educators who might benefit from it. Participant 8 mentioned learning it through a conversation with a friend suggesting that information circulate informally. Meanwhile, participant 9 expressed frustration over the struggles in finding a job after returning from working abroad.

“no, not at all” (Chris)

“Wala ko nakahibalo ana until we have a conversation with a friend, siya ng ingon nako nga nibalik na siya og teach kay naa kunoy balik turo program dadto sa ilang community pero wala ko kadungog ana diri sa amo. Probably because sa private school man gud ko permi wala jud ko kahibalo sa kanang government ba.”

(I didn’t know about that until I had a conversation with a friend. She told me that she had returned to teaching because there’s supposedly a Balik-Turo program in their community, but I haven’t heard about it here in our area. Probably because I’ve always been in private schools, so I really don’t know much about government programs.) (Mary)

“Never heard of it but it’s like great especially for teachers like me. I was really struggling to find a job after I came back here two years ago, but because they never had. This one they never had this one advertised or something. They never had this one on a paper where we signed before going to the US. And in fact, right now it’s also not written in there with the new set of comers?” (Jamie)

“never heard of it” (Carter)

The results reflect a need for improved communication and dissemination of important information to ensure that educators or beneficiaries are fully aware of the opportunities designed to help ensure a successful reintegration process after the program. A pertinent study that addresses the importance of communication in education can be claimed that good information and effective communication might help improve quality of learning and educational outcomes (Brinia et al., 2022)

Sub-Theme 4.3: Reintegration Expectations. The participants’ responses highlighted a range of concerns regarding the reintegration process after completing the program and returning to the home country. Simon and Jane’s statements advocated for policy where teachers’ positions should be given freedom to choose to resign during their time abroad, mentioning about an easy opportunity to share international experiences to their previous school.

“Sa akin, siguro ang in the first place kung cultural exchange siya, dapat sana, hindi ka finorce na mag resign sa first two years na andun ka sa US dapat sana gi float lang yong item mo ba para pagbalik mo ng Pinas makapag share ka ng experiences exactly dun sa previous school mo. Hindi na dapat mag resign or pwersang mag resign.

(For me, if it’s truly a cultural exchange, then in the first place, they shouldn’t have forced you to resign during the first two years you were in the US. They should have just floated your position so that when you return to the Philippines, you can share your experiences exactly in your previous school. There shouldn’t have been a need to resign or be forced to resign.) (Simon)

“Mas nindot seguro na dili Lang paresignon ang mga teachers nga ng apply og J-1 kay ngano gamit baya jud kaau nila ang mga teachers nga niadto sa gawas. Kay daghan baya kaau kog na learn na wala jud nako Nakita diri sa Pinas.”

(It would probably be better if teachers applying for the J-1 program were not required to resign because those teachers who went abroad are valuable. I’ve learned so many things that I never encountered here in the Philippines.) (Jane)

Participants like Justine and Mary expressed the need for better promotion or visibility of the structured program, Balik-Turo Program, especially to those who will benefit from it. Mark also mentioned for a group within the government to take responsibility for

monitoring the J1 teachers, especially after the program to ensure a smooth reintegration as well as to help address the issues related to job availability and professional growth.

“Advertise more, promote more so that teachers have the option to teach back in the Philippines. I think it’s okay for teachers to have the choice whether to return to teaching or look for another job, but if it’s beneficial for the teacher, then I think it would be better if they just promote it.” (Justine)

“They need to widen their announcement gani kay ako wala ko kadungog ana. I will be the first witness nga wala jud ko kahibalo sa ilang program.”

(They need to broaden their announcements because I haven’t heard about it. I can be the first to testify that I really didn’t know about their program.) (Mary)

“Naa unta naay grupo pud ba nga naglihok ana or somewhere sa government, any government agency nga mu look after sa namalik nga J1. Then bahin anang mga experiences sa J1, ganahan ba or okay lang ba ang tanan.”

(It would be good if there were a group or some government agency working on that—someone to look after returning J-1 participants. Then regarding the experiences of J-1 teachers, whether they liked it or if everything was okay.) (Mark)

Carter and Mark suggested seminars and professional development to ensure that teachers do not only reintegrate into the communities but also given opportunities to enhance skills further. Additionally, Mark expressed the emotional challenges associated upon returning to their home country.

“Mao ra gyud na akong maingon kanang kulang ta og professional development nga hopefully naay daghang exposure ba. Nya kana sad naa sad unta libre nga mga seminars or mga kuan nga ilang e build up sa mga teachers kay anyway ang mu provide sa mga ing ana ang deped ra man sad. Kana siguro, kung mahimo na sa deped, nindot siguro, daghan siguro mga teachers nga dili manlarga. Samot na kay maka feel man sila og sense of fulfillment ba.”

(That’s really all I can say—that we lack professional development, and hopefully, there will be more opportunities for exposure. Also, there should be free seminars or programs designed to help teachers grow because, after all, it’s DepEd that should provide these. If DepEd can make this happen, it would be great, and maybe more teachers wouldn’t leave. Especially because they would feel a sense of fulfillment.) (Carter)

“So I could say noh that the government especially the DepEd and you know, so they are going to like monitor teachers who came back to the Philippines and like ask us as to what is happening to us and you like offer us like re-employment opportunities because pag-abot jud namo diri kay natagbaw jud mig pangita og asa mi manarbaho, na stress mi like we are bread-winners noh, they are like wanting us to come back but the thing is it’s us who are like taking the initiative, it’s us who are like looking for a job, it’s us who are like asking the principals to invite us to share. We did not hear any word from DepEd, from the government, from the CFO or the Commission on Filipino Overseas. I’ve heard nothing from them.”

(So, I could say that the government, especially DepEd, should monitor teachers who returned to the Philippines and ask about what’s happening to us, then offer re-employment opportunities. Because when we arrived back here, we struggled a lot to find work, we were stressed—especially since we are breadwinners. They want us to return, but the thing is, we’re the ones taking the initiative. We’re the ones looking for jobs, we’re the ones asking principals to invite us to share. We didn’t hear anything from DepEd, from the government, or from the CFO (Commission on Filipino Overseas). I’ve heard nothing from them.) (Mark)

Theme 5: Professional and Cultural Re-entry Challenges

The responses from the participants reflect a range of emotions, expectations and challenges related to their professional and cultural reintegration after the J1 program. The researcher aimed to understand how the participants felt about returning to their hometown to teach after the program, what expectations they held, and whether those expectations were fulfilled upon their reintegration. This exploration provides valuable insights into the complexities of transitioning back into the local educational systems after their international experiences.

Judy and Jamie shared excitement and eagerness about bringing back new teaching perspectives while Mark had expectations of being invited as a resource speaker to train other teachers. On one hand, Chris anticipated a lighter teaching experience due to the difference in how students approach learning, however, the participant also anticipated a more demanding workload in terms of teaching responsibilities and preparation.

“Excited man ko ato. Kanang na filled with excitement with renewed sense of purpose. So akong gi anticipate nga to bring back what I learned and global perspectives nga would help students learning experiences. Kanang expectation, ako ra gyung mahunahunaan is to foster a more engaging classroom empower my students to see reading, mathematics as a tool and mura og akong nabati nga naa koy deep commitment ba sa pagbalik.”

(I was excited at that time, filled with excitement and a renewed sense of purpose. I anticipated bringing back what I had learned and the global perspectives that would enhance students’ learning experiences. My main expectation was to foster a more engaging

classroom environment, empower my students to see reading and mathematics as valuable tools, and I felt a deep sense of commitment upon my return.) (Judy)

"I was so excited. I can finally share my knowledge from the experiences that I have in the US." (Jamie)

"I expect that many schools will invite me to become resource speaker like to train their teachers about the things I learned in the US." (Mark)

"In regard to expectations, I would say it would be a lighter load when it comes to like the teaching part because we have the Philippines have the culture and kids just learn, tries to learn. But in regard to the workload. I expected that the workload would be much more bigger and much more hectic. That consumes a lot of time for your like preparation." (Chris)

Sub-Theme 5.1: Professional Re-entry Challenges. Despite the optimistic expectations, the participants encountered challenges in aligning their new practices with the existing school norms and resources. In this sub-theme, the researcher aimed to understand the challenges faced by the participants when reintegrating into their local school system. Based on the participants' utterances, majority of them identified limited resources as a significant challenge while some mentioned the cultural and pedagogical differences and time management in education.

Judy said she did not face much difficulty applying for a teaching position for being to the same private school. However, she mentioned adjusting to a more traditional method of teaching after being exposed to a student-centered teaching environment. This echoed Karen who expressed mixed emotions when attempting to introduce a new teaching method to their colleagues. She expressed the resilience of some teachers who preferred traditional methods. Studies have shown that while some teachers are willing to learn new and innovative teaching techniques, others may reject change due to comfort with established routines (Robinson, 2011).

"Wala ko naglisod pangapply kay diha man ko gikan nga private school. Murag kana rang adjusting to the more traditional nga method after experiencing a student-centered approach ba."

(I didn't have difficulty applying because I came from a private school. It's just that I had to adjust to using more traditional methods after experiencing a student-centered approach) (Judy)

"Well, so far in the school where I am affiliated right now, okay ra man sila, the admin accepted my shared experiences. Ang tag-iya or let say the admins, they wanted me to share with the teachers so nag seminar ko sa teachers but lahi man gud ang teachers karon oi. The new set of teachers accepted the changes of how kana ganing unsa imo na learn and then you wanted them to adapt as well. So, others reacted with a good one kana ganing "ai, kani, nindot ni" but the others are not because they want to stick with what they learn. They wanted the traditional way."

(Well, so far in the school where I am currently affiliated, they are okay with it, and the admin accepted the experiences I shared. The owner or, let's say, the admins, wanted me to share with the teachers, so I held a seminar for them. But the teachers now are different. The new set of teachers accepted the changes, like how I learned things and wanted them to adapt as well. Some reacted positively, saying, 'Oh, this is good,' but others didn't, because they wanted to stick with what they already know. They wanted the traditional way.) (Karen)

Another professional re-entry challenge that was mentioned in this study is the low salary for teachers. Carter's utterance reflects a common sentiment among the teachers in the Philippines when it comes to compensation. This perspective highlights the modest wage that teachers receive irrespective of their employment in public or private education institutions. In the Philippines, the salaries of the public school teachers are determined by a standardized salary grade system (DepEd Teachers Salary Grade | Amazing Increase This 2024 - Salary Grade PH, n.d.). This system assigns salary grades to Teacher I position up to Master Teacher IV position, with compensation increasing alongside the grade level. When comparing the teaching profession between the United States and the Philippines, there are notable differences in both compensation and career progression. In the United States, where the returning teachers came from, the teacher salary structures commonly follow a "step and lane" system, where compensation increases are based on years of experience "steps" and educational achievements "lanes" ("The Ins and Outs of Teacher Salaries", n.d.). This is different from the salary grade system of the Philippines where the pathway for progression with promotions often ties to tenure, performance, and further education.

"Financial wise kanang sa sweldo, wala man gud ko ng expect much kay gamay ra man ang sweldo sa Pilipinas ma public or private school."

(Financial-wise, when it comes to salary, I didn't really expect much because salaries in the Philippines are generally low, whether in public or private schools.) (Carter)

A different challenge experienced by the participant was the time management practice in the local school system. As mentioned, "other teachers were not conscious of the time, math overlaps with English" pointed out that the lack of awareness regarding time constraints and the overlap between subjects. Time management is crucial to the educational welfare of both the students and teachers.

"Ako jung makita sa system jud mam logging jud kay sa tanan and then dili sila conscious sa time. Ang Math, mu overlap sa English."

(What I really noticed about the system, ma'am, is that everything has to be logged, and they're not conscious of time. Math overlaps with English.) (Louisa)

However, Mary, Jamie, Juana, and Mark faced limited resources as a significant challenge during their integration process. This limitation impacted their ability to implement their acquired teaching strategies during the program. Mary pointed out the absence of whiteboards and Juana emphasized the difficulties caused by overcrowded classrooms. Meanwhile, Jamie and Mark expressed the struggle to integrate technology into their teaching practices citing the lack of computers and reliable internet connectivity.

"Wala mi white board kay very small school lagi kay mi, nya private school kaayo mi nya lack pud mi og resources"

(We don't have a whiteboard because we're a very small school, and it's a private school, plus we also lack resources.) (Mary)

"Mas daghan activities and didto sa US. Naa man pud diri sa Pilipinas but tungod sa kadaghang bata sa Pilipinas, maglisod ko, gamay pa gyud ang akong classroom, wala pud kaayo resources."

(There were more activities in the US. There are also activities here in the Philippines, but because of the large number of students, I find it challenging. My classroom is very small, and we also lack resources.) (Juana)

"I was expecting that I am able to share what I've learned, especially the LMS, but I wasn't able to do it because my school here in the Philippines does not have so much or no capacity to use the tools or something. No technology available for me to be able to use the application I wanted to use. I have to remember or adjust on how to teach without using technology, laptop or device in particular especially here in Bantayan Island." (Jamie)

"There are lots of challenges that I encounter because in the US my student, they have like one is to one ratio of laptops or ipads. So when I came back here in the Philippines, the number one issue is like the ratio of student devices and the poor internet connection in school. It's really hard for me to digitize my lesson and develop the 21st century skills. Since we don't have internet connection, I also can't use online math applications." (Mark)

Having spent five years in a system where earning students' respect was crucial for establishing authority and classroom management, Carter was initially surprised upon returning to their local education system. This indicates the cultural difference between their experience abroad and re-entry experiences.

"Makalitan ko usahay kay kana lagi the way ka sa five years nimo na didto nag deal ka studyante ban ga lahi kayog utok ban ga kinahanglan paka mu earn sa ilang respect. Pag-uli nako diri kay mura kog nakalitan ba nga ang atong studyante diri dili man d.i ing ani nga kinahanglan nimo e deal gyud. Pwede ra man d.i estoryahan like 'ma oni atong buhaton, they're gonna do it anyway. Walay daghan pangutana nga nagnung buhaton ni nato, nganung mag assignment man ta, nganung mag ing-ani man ta?' kana gani?"

(Sometimes I get surprised because during those five years abroad, I dealt with students who had a very different mindset, where you still had to earn their respect. When I returned here, I was a bit taken aback because our students here aren't like that—you don't need to handle them the same way. You can simply talk to them, like, 'This is what we're going to do,' and they'll just do it. There's no need for too many questions like, 'Why do we have to do this? Why do we have assignments? Why do we need to do this?' You know what I mean?) (Carter)

Carter also expressed that the reason he did not consider applying in the public school system is the perception of limited professional development opportunities. While public school teachers have access to in-service training (INSET), this opportunity is insufficient for continuous career growth. Carter in this study also shared insights from his colleague who initially held high-ranking positions in private school with master's and even doctorate degrees but despite securing a permanent teaching position in public school with competitive salaries, his colleague chose to return to private school. The decision to leave the public school teaching was influenced by the stagnation in career advancement.

"Sa akona man gud ang pinakauna gyud nga rason nganung wala jud ko nag public even before kay kana man gud nga idea nga ang mga public school teachers man gud kuwang kaayo sa profesional development nga makaingon ka ba nga naa gani kay growth makuha as profesional. Naa silay inset maam pero maka ana gyud ko mam nga naa koy daghang kaila gyud nya gikan sila sa private school like San Carlos before, taas na kaayo siyag rango ha nana syay masteral, naa syay doctorate degree, duha na man siguro to, nag pa item siya sa public dako iyang sweldo pero nibalik gyud siyag private school kay ingon siya wala kuno siyay growth makita sa public kay matapuln ka ba."

(For me, the main reason why I never considered teaching in a public school, even before, is the perception that public school teachers have very limited professional development opportunities. It feels like there's little room for growth as a professional. They do have in-service training (INSET), but I personally know many teachers who transferred from private schools—like those from San Carlos University—who already held high ranks, had master's degrees, and even doctoral degrees. One of them, I believe, had two doctorate degrees. Despite receiving a high salary after securing a permanent position in a public school, they eventually returned to private education. According to them, they didn't see any opportunities for professional growth in the public sector, and they felt that staying there would make them complacent.) (Carter)

This sentiment highlights the need for enhanced professional development programs withing the public education system to retain highly qualified teachers and promote continuous learning.

Sub-Theme 5.2: Cultural Re-Adaptation Challenges. In addition to the professional re-entry challenges, the participants also encounter significant re-adaptation challenges particularly in areas related to bureaucracy, efficiency, traffic, transportation, as well as cultural transitions.

The utterances below showed that these challenges highlight the complexity of reintegrating into the home country, where the experiences are much different during the program. These challenges include overcrowded classrooms, traffic and transportation systems, and lengthy processes for documents such as renewal of driver's licenses. Moreover, the slower pace and adjusting to the local norms further intensified their struggles. Related studies showed that such experiences were aligned with the concept of reverse culture shock which involves "the process of readjusting, reacculturating, and reassimilating into one's own home culture after living abroad for an extended period of time (Gaw, 2000).

"Ang akong kapuyan diri sa Pilipinas kay kana ganing long time maghulat ka? Kana ganing queuing nya pwerteng dugaya sa hulatanay diri. Kanang sa kuha kog driver's license, maglinya kag diri na pud, ari na pud ka diri, ana gani. Pasa-pasa ka ba. Mao na akong kalagutan usahay but wala tay mahimo kay mao baya na siya diri gyud."

(What exhausts me here in the Philippines is the long waiting time. You know, the queuing takes so long. Like when I got my driver's license, you line up here, then you go there, and so on. It's like being passed around. That's what frustrates me sometimes, but there's nothing we can do because that's just how it is here.) (Juana)

"Nagrenew ko balik sa akong driver's license. Una naa ta fixer baya, so ng fixer ko kay I don't want to get through the line kay if mu get through ka sa line, daghan na man kaayo proceso. Unya walay card, physical card. Nahutdan daw og physical card ang LTO so ang gihatag paper, us ana ka tuig ang nilabay, wala gihapon koy physical card."

(I renewed my driver's license. First, I had a fixer because I didn't want to go through the line. If you go through the line, there are too many processes. And there's no physical card. They said the LTO ran out of physical cards, so they gave me a paper. It's been a year, and I still don't have the physical card.) (Mary)

"Gisapot lang ko sa pamaagi nga kumplekado nga dili angay himuong kumplekado"

(I just get annoyed with the complicated process that doesn't need to be made complicated.) (Judy)

"Sa Pinas is maraming pila, like maraming waiting pa, mas matagal kang dumating sa byahe."

(In the Philippines, there are many queues, like a lot of waiting, and it takes longer to reach your destination.) (Simon)

Justine noted the heavy traffic and slower pacing here in the home country comparing it with their experience abroad. This reflects a re-adjusting challenges to local living conditions. These challenges align with the concept of reverse culture shock, wherein returnees must adjust to local conditions that differ from their expectations formed abroad (Gaw, 2000).

"Unya sa cultural, mas traffic diri sa Pinas kesa US. In terms of our way of living mas slower ang Philippines in terms of like tanan, traffic, pagprocess og papers, na stress ko sa mga e-bike."

(Culturally, there's more traffic here in the Philippines compared to the US. In terms of our way of living, everything is slower in the Philippines—traffic, processing papers—it stresses me out, especially with the e-bikes.) (Justine)

Mary stated about not wanting to go back to the home country. As noted, they had achieved a sense of peace during their time abroad, due to the structure, environment, and lifestyle they encountered abroad. This reflects the emotional struggle and personal conflict during re-entry process. Related studies have shown that individuals who have adapted to a different cultural setting often develop new values, routines, and expectations that can clash with those of their original culture (Martin & Harrell, 2004)

"Actually, di jud ko ganahan muoli kay ganahan nako sa akong peace when it comes lang sa kaugalingon."

(Actually, I really didn't want to go home because I've found peace when it comes to myself.) (Mary)

Sub-Theme 5.3: Coping Mechanisms. Participants employed various coping mechanisms to navigate these challenges, such as finding ways to incorporate technology into teaching, being versatile in adjusting to the current teaching pedagogy. Previous studies show that the linkages of technology to the specific needs of learners (Leach, 2005, p.112) is the most effective learner-centered tool than a traditional pedagogy (Harrison, n.d.). Although technologies hold immense potential in education, they also present teachers with additional challenges to address. Emerging technologies can enhance teaching and learning experiences (Celik et al., 2024).

When asked about how they adapt and cope with the challenges during their reintegration, Mark responded to the lack of internet connection in school by downloading offline videos for teaching ahead of time. Additionally, Mary took the initiative and resourcefulness in finding other means to accomplish the activities. These experiences illustrate adaptability and resourcefulness as their adaptive strategies to cope with the substantial differences between their experiences abroad and their current settings.

"What I do to adapt and cope up with this experience is I just like do offline PowerPoint presentations more on like downloading ahead the videos since there's no internet connection. I'm being resourceful" (Mark)

"I'm being resourceful. I'm taking my initiative, finding other ways to accomplish activities. Kana bitawng makaingon ka na lisura aning mga activities oi kay wala ko ani, wala ko ana. Pero nangita kog lain gani na mahitabo siya, kay kami lisod kaayo mig printer. Private kaayo mi ha pero wala gi providan og printer. So kay resourceful man kaayo ko, balik ta sa manila paper og pentel pen. Ing-ana ta ka resourceful kay I thought na innovative na. Innovative na baya kaayo ta didto sa States kay computer na baya kaayo ang gamit sa mga bata. Sa pagbalik diri, pasalamat ra sad ko nga kanang nagsugod gyud ta saw ala gani, nya nibalik na sad ta. When it comes to test, balik jud ta sa traditional, paper and pen test."

(I'm being resourceful. I'm taking the initiative, finding other ways to accomplish activities. You could say that these activities are difficult because I don't have this or that. But I looked for other ways to make it happen, because we really have a hard time with printers. We're a private school, but we weren't provided with a printer. So, being very resourceful, I went back to using manila paper and pentel pens. That's how resourceful we are, because I thought that was innovative. We were really innovative in the States because the kids there use computers a lot. When I came back here, I'm just thankful that we really started from scratch, and now we're back to it. When it comes to tests, we really go back to the traditional, paper-and-pen test.) (Mary)

Mary transitioned from a technology-rich environment abroad to a resource-limited setting, returning to traditional methods of teaching. This suggests that returning teachers must be flexible and adaptable to the resources available in their school.

"So, being very resourceful, I went back to using manila paper and pentel pens ... when it comes to tests, we really go back to the traditional, paper -and-pen test." (Mary)

Another participant, Mark, shared the challenges he faced in securing a teaching position upon his return. He recounted his experience with evident frustration and emotional strain. His experience highlights the emotional toll and bureaucratic barriers that returning teachers may encounter during their reintegration into the local education system.

"I heard about the program SPIMS and to be honest I applied. I submitted my application online and there is no response from them. So, I follow up there's no response and I do not know what happened. I felt so depressed during that time. I really wanted to go back to the public schools because I'm very eager to like to help our students but there's no response from them." (Mark)

To cope with this challenge, the participant took the initiative to seek alternative employment opportunities in the private sector. As Mark expressed below, his decision reflects the resilience and determination of returning teachers to continue their profession despite systemic obstacles.

"Since I got no response from the Balik-Turo program, what I did is I just looked for private schools to employ me." (Mark)

Conclusions

This study explored the experiences of Filipino mathematics teachers upon their return to the Philippines after participating in the J-1 cultural exchange program in the United States. Through the qualitative method, the study identified various challenges these educators faced during their professional re-entry, such as difficulties in securing employment, adjustments in teaching practices, and emotional and cultural transitions. Despite these challenges, the participants exhibited resilience, adaptability, and a strong dedication to their profession, drawing on both their local upbringing and international experiences to facilitate their transition.

The findings highlight the need for structured and supportive reintegration systems to assist returning teachers in effectively applying their acquired skills and experiences within the Philippine educational system. This includes improved institutional support, clearer pathways for re-employment, and recognition of international teaching experience.

However, the study is subject to certain limitations. The small purposive sample limits the generalizability of the findings to J-1 teachers from other disciplines. Moreover, reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, memory lapses, or selective reporting. The study also lacks institutional perspectives, as it does not incorporate insights from schools, government agencies, or other stakeholders involved in the re-entry process. Additionally, the literature review encountered a significant gap, with no directly relevant prior research conducted by Filipino J-1 returnees available, limiting the study's theoretical foundation and comparative depth.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes valuable insights into an underexplored area and paves the way for further research and policy development aimed at supporting returning international educators.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are presented to support the reintegration process of the J1 participants. For policy makers and educational institutions, offer continued professional development (PD) opportunities for returning J1 teachers to keep them engaged in lifelong learning. By regularly participating in PD, teachers can continually refine and apply their understanding of new material in their classrooms. Increase teacher compensation to attract and retain highly qualified teachers. The government should implement a salary adjustment plan that aligns with inflation rates and provides competitive compensation comparable to neighboring countries. Streamline the hiring and regularization process. The prolonged process of obtaining a permanent teaching position "item" in the public school system discourages skilled teachers such as returning J-1 teachers and creates job insecurity.

Establish a formal system for sharing the best practices learned by the returning J-1 teachers, provide resources, training and mentorship to help them adapt to the existing practices and ensure smooth and beneficial reintegration. Addressing these recommendations fosters a more sustainable and motivated teaching workforce, which will, in turn, improve the quality of education for Filipino students.

For aspiring J1 teachers, seek out support to help navigate the reintegration process including the sharing of newly acquired skills during the program. Remain versatile and maintain an open mind as you adapt and blend your newly acquired skills with the existing practices and expectations.

For past beneficiaries of the J-1 program for teachers, it is crucial to highlight the positive aspects of their exchange experience to inspire others to participate.

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