IJGGSD
International Journal of Global Goals and Sustainable Development
RESEARCH | INNOVATION | INCLUSION | SUSTAINABLE FUTURES
ISSN: 3155-7716
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65339/ijggsd.V1.I1.121

Filipino Science Teachers' Cultural Identity and Pedagogical Experiences in Chicago Public Schools: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how Filipino science teachers in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) interpreted their cultural identities in relation to their lived pedagogical experiences. Employing a qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design, the study involved ten co-participants selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed through individual and cross-case interpretation. Findings revealed six candidate Group Experiential Themes encompassing respect and authority, cultural-professional commitments, cultural visibility, cultural knowledge in science instruction, professional reconstruction, and the strengths and limitations of adjustment. Participants maintained Filipino cultural values while adapting to unfamiliar classroom expectations, curriculum requirements, and institutional conditions. Cultural knowledge enriched selected science lessons, while communication difficulties, emotional strain, and identity-related concerns presented challenges to professional adjustment. The study concludes that cultural identity and pedagogical experiences are interconnected yet context-dependent, reflecting both cultural continuity and professional transformation. It recommends strengthening science-specific mentoring, intercultural communication, culturally responsive instruction, and institutional support for internationally recruited teachers. Limitations include the small, context-specific sample, reliance on self-reported experiences, and outstanding participant eligibility and source-authentication verification. The study's principal contribution is the proposed seven-component Context-Responsive Science Teacher Transition and Practice Support Framework, which requires further validation and evaluation. The study supports SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), contributing to educational, cultural, and institutional sustainability through its emphasis on inclusive science education, professional development, and equitable teacher support.

Keywords: *Cultural Identity, Filipino Science Teachers, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Pedagogical Experiences, Professional Adaptation, Teacher Agency, Teacher Mobility*

1. INTRODUCTION

International teacher mobility has become a response to global teacher shortages and increasing demands for quality education. UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024) projected a global shortage of 44 million primary and secondary teachers by 2030. Similarly, the National Center for Education Statistics (2024) reported difficulties in filling teaching positions in U.S. public schools, particularly in specialized disciplines such as science. However, international teaching involves not only professional relocation but also cultural adjustment, pedagogical adaptation, and negotiation of professional identity. Rosenfeld and Yemini (2023) and Zhai et al. (2024) emphasized that teachers' identities develop through personal experiences, professional relationships, and institutional environments. Among Filipino educators, Dempsey (2024), Rosales (2024), and Avelino (2026) identified challenges involving cultural differences, communication, classroom management, and unfamiliar educational expectations. Jung and Choe (2024) further highlighted the dynamic relationship between cultural background and professional identity. In science education, Strat et al. (2024) emphasized inquiry-based instruction, while Ogodo (2024) and Tran and Guzey (2023) highlighted the importance of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogical practices. These perspectives are particularly relevant to Chicago Public Schools (CPS), where culturally and linguistically responsive education is an institutional priority, as emphasized by the Chicago Board of Education (2024). Understanding how Filipino science teachers negotiate their cultural identities while adapting to diverse educational environments is essential to promoting inclusive instruction, professional development, and sustainable institutional support.

Research Problem

Despite growing research on international teacher mobility, limited attention has been given to the relationship between Filipino science teachers' cultural identities and their lived pedagogical experiences within specific educational environments. Alendajao et al. (2024), Dempsey (2024), and Samia and Calaguas (2026) examined the cultural, linguistic, and professional challenges encountered by Filipino teachers abroad, while Yap and Elesio (2026) explored Filipino science teachers' experiences in the American educational system. However, a contextual and methodological gap remains in understanding how Filipino science teachers specifically employed in Chicago Public Schools interpret the relationship between their cultural identities and pedagogical experiences. The study addressed this gap through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), focusing on individual experiences, cultural identity negotiation, pedagogical adjustment, and shared and divergent experiential meanings.

Assumptions of the Study

The study was grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Smith et al. (2022) explained that IPA recognizes the subjective and contextual nature of lived experiences while acknowledging the researcher's interpretative role through the double hermeneutic. The study assumed that cultural identity is dynamic and personally interpreted, that Filipino science teachers may experience similar educational conditions differently, and that their pedagogical practices develop through interactions among cultural backgrounds, professional experiences, and institutional expectations. It further assumed that participants' accounts provide meaningful insights into their lived experiences without presupposing uniform or causal relationships between cultural identity and pedagogical practices.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to examine how Filipino science teachers in Chicago Public Schools made sense of their cultural identities in relation to their lived pedagogical experiences. Specifically, it sought to explore their cultural identities and pedagogical experiences; understand how cultural

identities were expressed, maintained, and negotiated through teaching practices; examine the challenges and opportunities associated with cultural identity negotiation; identify shared and divergent experiential meanings; and propose a practice-based support framework for internationally recruited science teachers.

Theoretical or Conceptual Basis

The study was anchored in the Funds of Identity Approach and the Ecological Approach to Teacher Agency. Esteban-Guitart et al. (2023) and Alvarez et al. (2023) emphasized that culturally and socially developed knowledge, relationships, experiences, and practices serve as meaningful resources for identity construction. This perspective provided a foundation for understanding how Filipino science teachers interpreted and expressed their cultural identities within their professional environments. Meanwhile, Priestley et al. (2026) explained that teacher agency emerges through interactions among previous experiences, professional aspirations, and existing cultural, structural, and material conditions. Leijen et al. (2024) further emphasized the multidimensional nature of teacher agency. This perspective supported the examination of how Filipino science teachers responded to curriculum expectations, classroom challenges, and institutional conditions. Together, these frameworks guided the interpretation of cultural identity and pedagogical experiences as interconnected and context-dependent phenomena, providing a conceptual foundation for the proposed teacher support framework without imposing predetermined analytical categories.

The study aligns with the United Nations (2025) Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 – Quality Education, SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities. SDG 4 is addressed through the promotion of culturally responsive science education, teacher competence, and continuous professional development. SDG 8 is supported through the examination of professional adjustment, workplace support, and teacher well-being. SDG 10 is reflected in the recognition of cultural diversity, equitable professional opportunities, and inclusive educational environments. Collectively, the study contributes to educational, cultural, and institutional sustainability through its proposed context-responsive support framework, which seeks to strengthen teacher development, professional inclusion, and sustainable support for internationally recruited science teachers.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative approach that examines how individuals interpret and make sense of their lived experiences. Creswell and Poth (2024) emphasized the importance of understanding participants' perspectives within their social and cultural contexts. Grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith & Nizza, 2022; Smith et al., 2022), the study examined participants' individual experiences before identifying shared and divergent meanings. The double hermeneutic guided the interpretative process, wherein participants made sense of their experiences while the researcher interpreted their accounts.

Research Locale or Study Setting

The study was conducted within Chicago Public Schools in Chicago, Illinois, United States. The district provides a culturally, linguistically, and socially diverse educational environment. Chicago Public Schools (2026) reported an enrollment of 316,224 students across 626 schools for School Year 2025–2026. The setting was particularly relevant because of the district's international teacher recruitment initiatives and diverse classroom environments, which

provided opportunities to examine cultural identity negotiation and pedagogical adaptation among Filipino science teachers.

Participants or Data Sources

The study involved ten co-participants selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. The established inclusion criteria required Filipino-born teachers who completed teacher preparation in the Philippines, had previous science-teaching experience in the Philippine educational system, entered the United States through the J-1 Teacher Exchange Visitor Program, and had sustained science-teaching experience within CPS. The sample size supported the idiographic nature of IPA, emphasizing the richness and depth of individual accounts rather than statistical representation or data saturation. Participant eligibility was subject to verification against the established inclusion criteria.

Research Instruments or Materials

The primary research instruments were a participant context form and a semi-structured interview guide. The context form collected relevant personal and professional information, including educational qualifications, science specialization, teaching assignments, and teaching experience. The interview guide consisted of open-ended, nonleading questions addressing cultural identity, pedagogical experiences, cultural identity negotiation, and professional challenges and opportunities. The instrument review procedures emphasized clarity, relevance, neutrality, and alignment with the research objectives and IPA methodology.

Data Gathering Procedure

Following eligibility screening and informed consent, participants completed the context form and participated in individual semi-structured interviews conducted remotely through Zoom. Each interview was scheduled for approximately 60–90 minutes outside participants' regular working hours. Consistent with IPA interviewing principles (Smith & Nizza, 2022; Smith et al., 2022), flexible follow-up questions encouraged participants to elaborate on meaningful experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English when necessary while preserving their original contextual and cultural meanings. Reflexive notes and analytic memos supported the documentation of the research process.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed manually following the systematic procedures of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2022). The process involved reading and rereading transcripts, exploratory noting, developing experiential statements, constructing Personal Experiential Themes (PETs), and examining convergence and divergence across cases to develop Group Experiential Themes (GETs). Consistent with Nigbur and Chatfield (2025), thematic interpretation emphasized individual experiential meanings and their grounding in participants' accounts. The Funds of Identity Approach and Ecological Approach to Teacher Agency informed subsequent interpretation rather than serving as predetermined coding categories. Research trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024). Repeated transcript examination, reflexive documentation, audit trails, and analytical cross-checking procedures supported methodological rigor and transparency.

Ethical Consideration

The research protocol required ethical clearance from the University of Perpetual Help System DALTA Ethics Review Committee and applicable authorization from Chicago Public Schools before participant recruitment and data collection. Participants were informed of the study's

purpose, procedures, potential risks, confidentiality measures, and voluntary nature. Informed consent and permission for audio recording were obtained separately. Participants retained the right to decline questions or withdraw without penalty, subject to the approved consent conditions. Confidentiality was protected through participant codes, de-identification, encrypted data storage, and restricted access to research records. Recruitment was separated from the researcher's professional responsibilities within CPS to minimize potential conflicts of interest, perceived pressure, and employment-related risks.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Cultural Identity and Pedagogical Experiences

3.1.1 Filipino Cultural Identity in Science Teaching

The findings revealed that participants associated their Filipino cultural identities with respect, compassion, perseverance, resourcefulness, and professional responsibility. These values remained meaningful despite differences in classroom expectations and professional environments. However, participants expressed their cultural identities differently depending on their personal experiences, professional relationships, and encounters with cultural recognition and linguistic differences. Esteban-Guitart et al. (2023) emphasized that identity develops through personally meaningful cultural experiences and social resources. Similarly, Kim (2022), Rosenfeld and Yemini (2023), and Yip et al. (2024) highlighted the dynamic construction of professional identity among internationally mobile teachers. These perspectives reinforce the findings that cultural identity remains meaningful during professional transitions without necessarily determining every aspect of teaching practice.

3.1.2 Lived Pedagogical Experiences in Science Teaching

Participants described pedagogical experiences involving classroom management, instructional adjustments, student engagement, communication, curriculum expectations, and professional support. Some reconsidered their previous approaches to classroom discipline and student interaction, while others maintained established teaching practices. Collegial assistance and professional learning supported their adjustment to unfamiliar educational expectations. Priestley et al. (2026) explained that teacher agency develops through interactions among previous experiences, professional aspirations, and institutional conditions. Ganesan and Morales (2024) and Grapin et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of responding to cultural and linguistic diversity in science education. Furthermore, Hogan and Bae (2025) demonstrated how organizational conditions and professional learning opportunities shape teachers' capacity to implement equitable science instruction. These perspectives suggest that pedagogical adaptation involves both individual initiative and institutional support.

3.1.3 Expression and Negotiation of Cultural Identity Through Pedagogical Practices

Participants expressed their cultural identities through classroom relationships, professional commitments, and selected instructional practices. Some incorporated Filipino cultural knowledge, particularly examples involving food, food preservation, and Philippine geography, into science lessons. However, other instructional decisions were primarily guided by students' learning needs, curriculum requirements, and institutional expectations rather than cultural identity. Esteban-Guitart et al. (2023) highlighted the educational relevance of culturally meaningful knowledge and experiences. Tran and Guzey (2023) and Smith et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies in science education. Similarly, Ayano et al. (2025) demonstrated how science teachers incorporate

cultural identities and social contexts into instructional adaptations. These findings suggest that cultural identity can serve as a pedagogical resource, although its application remains selective and context-dependent.

3.2 Challenges and Opportunities in Cultural Identity Negotiation

Participants encountered challenges involving unfamiliar classroom expectations, communication difficulties, emotional strain, cultural differences, and professional adjustment. Some experienced vulnerability associated with their accents or nationality, while others reported professional acceptance without discrimination. Opportunities included cultural recognition, supportive collegial relationships, professional development, and meaningful integration of Filipino cultural knowledge into science instruction. Alendajao et al. (2024) identified linguistic and communication challenges among Filipino teachers working abroad, while Ndiang'ui and Aydin (2024) highlighted the complexities of immigrant teachers' professional adjustment. Yip and Saito (2025) further explained that immigrant teachers' professional belonging is shaped by identity, vulnerability, and intercultural experiences. Through the ecological perspective of Priestley et al. (2026), these findings demonstrate that professional adjustment depends not only on personal resilience but also on supportive institutional conditions.

3.3 Shared and Divergent Meanings Between Cultural Identity and Pedagogical Experiences

The cross-case analysis identified six candidate Group Experiential Themes concerning respect and authority, cultural-professional commitments, cultural visibility, cultural knowledge in science instruction, professional reconstruction, and the strengths and limitations of adjustment. Although participants shared certain cultural values and professional experiences, differences emerged in their interpretations of classroom authority, cultural recognition, instructional adaptation, and professional belonging. Rushton et al. (2023) emphasized that teacher identity is multidimensional and shaped by personal and professional contexts. Rosenfeld et al. (2022) similarly established the interconnected nature of professional identity and agency among internationally mobile teachers. Consistent with Esteban-Guitart et al. (2023) and Priestley et al. (2026), the findings suggest that cultural identity and pedagogical experiences are interconnected but do not constitute a uniform or causal relationship. Smith et al. (2022) reinforced the importance of preserving individual meanings alongside shared experiential patterns in phenomenological inquiry.

3.4 Proposed Context-Responsive Science Teacher Transition and Practice Support Framework

The synthesized findings provided the foundation for the proposed Context-Responsive Science Teacher Transition and Practice Support Framework. It comprises seven interconnected components addressing classroom relationships and professional expectations, science-specific instructional mentoring, cultural-science lesson planning, intercultural communication, identity-related concerns, professional belonging and personal transition, and access to science instructional resources. Yap and Elesio (2026) and Candelario and Abo (2025) highlighted the importance of professional preparation and instructional support in addressing science teachers' challenges. Maloch et al. (2025) further emphasized the significance of context-responsive mentoring that recognizes teachers' individual circumstances. The proposed framework also complements teacher development priorities identified by the

Department of Education (2022), the Second Congressional Commission on Education (2025), and UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024). Accordingly, the framework offers a findings-based approach to supporting internationally recruited science teachers while promoting cultural inclusion, professional development, and educational sustainability. However, its effectiveness remains subject to future implementation and evaluation.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The The study concludes that Filipino science teachers in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) experienced cultural identity and pedagogical adaptation as interconnected yet context-dependent aspects of their professional lives. Filipino cultural values, including respect, compassion, perseverance, and resourcefulness, remained meaningful while participants adjusted to unfamiliar classroom expectations, instructional practices, and institutional requirements. Although cultural knowledge enriched selected science lessons and classroom relationships, pedagogical decisions were also shaped by student needs, curriculum standards, and professional responsibilities. Participants experienced varying degrees of cultural recognition, communication difficulties, emotional strain, and professional belonging, demonstrating that international teaching involves both cultural continuity and professional transformation. These shared and divergent experiences indicate that cultural identity does not uniformly determine pedagogical practices. The study's principal contribution is the proposed Context-Responsive Science Teacher Transition and Practice Support Framework, which recognizes teachers' cultural identities, previous professional expertise, and individual support needs within their receiving educational environments.

The study recommends that CPS administrators and school leaders strengthen pre-arrival preparation, school-specific orientation, and professional support for internationally recruited science teachers. Science department heads and instructional mentors should provide context-responsive mentoring, collaborative lesson planning, curriculum familiarization, and access to appropriate instructional resources. Teachers and curriculum planners should integrate culturally relevant examples when scientifically accurate and aligned with learning objectives. Philippine teacher education institutions should strengthen preparation in intercultural communication, culturally responsive science instruction, differentiated teaching, and professional adjustment. School administrators should establish accessible and confidential mechanisms for addressing cultural misunderstandings, identity-related concerns, and professional difficulties while promoting voluntary peer support and professional belonging. Furthermore, the proposed support framework should undergo institutional review, pilot implementation, and evaluation to determine its feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness. Future researchers should conduct longitudinal phenomenological studies across different educational settings to examine the development of cultural identity and pedagogical practices over time.

The study was limited to ten co-participants within Chicago Public Schools, whose self-reported experiences were examined through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Its context-specific and idiographic design limits statistical generalizability to other teacher populations and educational settings. The findings reflected participants' experiences during a particular period without direct classroom observation or longitudinal assessment. Outstanding participant eligibility and interview source-authentication concerns also require verification to strengthen the credibility of the interpretations. Furthermore, the proposed support framework was not implemented, independently validated, or evaluated. Future studies may address these

limitations through verified participant selection, broader educational settings, longitudinal interviews, and systematic framework evaluation.

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