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Filipino EFL Teachers Working Abroad: Some benefits and downsides for English teachers working abroad

Filippinska EFL lärare som arbetar utomlands:

Några för och nackdelar för lärare i engelska som arbetar utomlands

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Abstract

This paper investigates foreign born teachers working as EFL educators and their attitudes towards teaching as well as their roles in teaching the English language. The purpose of this study is to examine what motivates EFL teachers to work abroad and to explore why they are highly valued in non-English speaking countries. Through qualitative interviews with four (4) Filipino teachers working overseas as EFL educators their strengths and weaknesses are explored. My investigation shows that the Filipino teachers' primary role is to teach communication and literacy skills. In addition, the reasons why these four teachers have chosen to work abroad are higher salary rates and better working conditions. However, their lack of knowledge of the local language and culture are their weaknesses. Finally, findings show that the respondents' positive attitude towards teaching English abroad shows the importance of English in globalization.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, native speaker ideal, native English speaking teacher and non native English speaking teacher

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1. Introduction

The world is becoming more of a “global village”, and English language is viewed as the number one language of communication. According to Svartvik (1999): "a) more than 70 countries have English as the official or co-official language; b) a ratio of one in five persons in the world has some knowledge of the English language; c) around one billion people study the language; d) a majority of all electronics manuals are in English, and most importantly; e) it is the dominant language used in media, business, science and technology" (Svartvik in Lundahl, 2009, pp.71-72).

The increasing use of English for communication fuels the demands for English teachers (Crystal, 2003). However, the increase in the number of learners does not match the global demands for native English speaking teachers (NEST). In pure economic terms, the demand for native English speaking teachers is greater than the supply of native English speaking teachers (Bayyurt, 2006). Thus, non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST) are needed (ibid, 2006).

English is perceived as the language of success, linked to social mobility, status and economic security, parents in non-English speaking countries throughout the world are convinced that their children must learn English before any other language (ibid, 2002b). Moreover, they spend time and money to find the best ‘representative’ teachers of the English for their children. In other words, parents prefer to hire native speakers of a specific variety of English.

One country which is considered as a close ‘representative’ of the English language is the Philippines. The term ‘representative’ means that the Philippines is not a native English speaking country, but the English language is the country’s second medium of instruction in school and business. The Philippines has high literacy rates of 87% and good English speaking ability (Jinkinson, 2003). In the past ten years, the Philippines has exported approximately four thousand teachers, primarily in the subjects of math, science, English, and special education. Tubeza (2009) enumerates the top destinations as being primarily non-English speaking countries such as Japan, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. However, even the United States, an English speaking country, imports foreign English teachers and is included as one of the top destinations for Filipino teachers. By Filipinos we mean the natives or citizens of the Philippine Republic.

1.1 Purpose of the research

This study examines what motivates Filipino EFL teachers to work abroad. It also discusses why the native English speaking teachers are highly valued in non-English speaking countries. Four Filipino teachers' personal observations regarding their teaching experiences and their perceptions of themselves as foreign teachers of English are explored. In addition, this study investigates why Filipino EFL teachers are often preferred in non-English speaking countries.

Moreover, I believe that my interviews with four Filipino EFL teachers may provide insights regarding advantages and disadvantages in working abroad as EFL teachers.

1.2 Research question

This research seeks to answer the following research question: What do some Filipino EFL teachers working abroad identify as their relative strength and weakness in comparison to native English instructors?

2. Background

This section covers the historical perspective of the Philippines as to why English became the first medium of language in all Philippine schools and how the country became one of the leading English speaking societies in Asia. This section also present articles and relevant former studies used in this research. It mentions why Filipinos often possess good English language skills and why many Filipino teachers go abroad to work as English teachers. It also shelves a comparison of native speakers of English or the NS and non native speakers of English or the NNS abilities and responsibilities in the English classrooms.

2.1 Historical perspective of English learning in the Philippines

Historically, the country was occupied and colonized by three countries. Bolton and Bautista (2004) claim that first, it was occupied by Spain from 1565 to 1896. However, the Spanish language was only introduced to the privileged few. Second, the Japanese invaded the country during World War II, from 1941 to 1944. Since the occupation only lasted a short period, few Filipinos learned to speak the language. This was not the case with the English language. The US liberated Philippines from Spain 1898 and from Japan in 1946. In their help for the Filipinos to recover, the Americans introduced the English language in Philippine schools during these two periods (Bolton and Bautista, 2004).

They (ibid, 2004) also claim that the first group of English teachers (the American teachers) came to the Philippines in 1901. They were assigned to teach reading and writing throughout the islands. One of their tasks was to train Filipinos to teach. By 1921, the native-born Filipino teachers reached ninety one per cent of the Filipino teachers. Gonzales (1997) mentions that the rapid spread of English language in the Philippines was unprecedented in colonial history. Within the space of 41 years, the American regime had done more to spread English than the Spanish Government did during 333 years (1565-1898) of colonization. For at the end of Spanish Period, only 2% spoke Spanish (Gonzales, 1997, p. 28).

2.2 Previous research

According to research published by Bolton and Bautista (2004), the Philippines was said to be the third largest English speaking society in the world. Regardless of the accuracy of such claims, there is no doubt that possessing good English language skills influences the personal and public life in Philippine society. It is the co-official language of government law and education as well as be the language of instruction in school. More importantly, the English language dominates Philippine culture, music, media, films, and television. Bolton's and Bautista's (2004) major points are easily summarized:

- The role of English in the Philippines is affected by colonialism,
- Economically, socially, and ethnically, there is a wide gap between the upper classes and lower classes of Philippine society,
- The direct outcome of economic challenges resulted in more than eight million Filipinos, and particularly the women, to seek work overseas.

The reasons why many Filipinos work abroad are mainly due to economic reasons. Both Bolton and Bautista (2004) and Ubalde (2007) see the economic factor as the driving force for Filipino teachers to seek work overseas. Ubalde (2007) added that Filipino teachers are highly esteemed abroad. They are paid up to ten times their salaries in the Philippines, and they are often important providers for their families.

In the process according to Ubalde (2007), the Philippines lose many of its better, if not the best, teachers in specialty subjects such as Science, Mathematics and English. To phrase it differently: the Philippines experiences a significant brain-drain of its most educated and literate citizens. While this is a loss for the Philippines, it is a win for other countries. At the same time, all choices have consequences. Ubalde (2007) mentions that the Philippines find itself with more than a brain-drain issue. It also faces pedagogical challenges. There are disadvantages and advantages experienced by Filipinos when working as EFL teachers abroad.

Similar to the research conducted for this paper, Cook (2007) enumerates pedagogical challenges as well as advantages for American respondents working overseas. In his study, Cook discovered that American teachers gained wider cultural awareness, learned new teaching strategies, acquired more international connections, and learned to appreciate other cultures as well as achieving a greater appreciation of their own culture. Cook also reveals challenges which his American respondents encountered while working abroad. These challenges are noted as being the

lack of knowledge regarding the local language, the new classroom setting and the culture. The overall effect on the respondents is a tendency to feel inadequate as a teacher (Cook, 2007).

2.2.1 Native English speaking teachers vs. Non-native English speaking teachers

Filipinos working as EFL teachers in a non-English speaking country display both strengths and weaknesses. Arva and Medgyes' (2000) in their study *Native and Non-native Teachers in the Classroom* point to the differences between native English speaking teachers and non-native English speaking teachers or NESTs and NNESTs. Their research demonstrates that native English speaking teachers are superior in their capability to use the English language spontaneously and in most communicative situations. On the other hand, non-native English speaking teachers generally have better knowledge of grammar. Most native English speaking teachers do not encounter grammar until they begin teaching, whereas non-native English speaking teachers are used to learning English with the help of grammar (Arva and Medgyes, 2000).

This reinforces Cook's (2007) study, that non-native English speaking teachers have an advantage in connecting to learners, because non-natives have the knowledge of the local language. They are also more empathetic because they understand what the language learners go through.

Still, these two groups of English teachers (NEST, NNEST) differ in terms of language proficiency and teaching behavior (Arva & Medgyes, 2000). However, they also argue that NNEST are equally good as teachers in their own terms. Medgyes showed this in a research survey at an *English Language Teaching Journal* (ELT) Symposium. He conducted a survey of all ELT specialists who attended the symposium in London and asked who they would prefer to hire: 1) a native speaker, even when they are not qualified; 2) a qualified non-native teacher; or 3) the native speaker/non-native speaker issue would not be part of the selection criteria.

Interestingly, the results shocked Medgyes when it was discovered that two-thirds of the sixty respondents chose a qualified non-native teacher, one-third of the respondents chose the irrelevance of the native/non-native speaker issue and no one chose a native speaker.

Similar to Arva & Medgyes, Hayes (2009) study states non-native English teachers are fluent as well. However, their stronger areas of teaching are reading and grammar skills. The recognized strengths of native English teachers are, by contrast, in literature, in cultural aspects and pronunciation of the English language.

Hayes (2009) adds that non-native teachers may not be native English teachers and, non-natives may be natives in terms of situational competence. For instance, the respondents in this

research were not native Thai or Japanese. They were not even native-born English speakers, rather the best representatives for the English language. However, they had closer knowledge about the English culture than the locals. This implies that non-native English speaking teachers may have similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds as their students and, while having second-hand knowledge of the culture of the English speaking countries as well as their own.

2.3 Definitions of terms

Several important terms are mentioned in this research such as *English as a Foreign Language*, or *EFL*, *Filipino*, *NS ideal*, *native English speaking teacher* or *NEST* and *nonnative English speaking teacher* or *NNEST*. The world wide use of the English language alters the categorization of the learners. Formerly English learners are classified as *inner*, *outer* and *expanding circle*. Recently, this classification of English learners is altered and that focused more in accordance to *high proficiency* and *low proficiency* circle as explained further below.

2.3.1 Native speaker

David Crystal (2003) describes the term native speaker as somebody who acquires the language in a natural setting during childhood. The native speaker has intuitive knowledge about his or her language. The way the native speaks or uses the language can be trusted. Jenkins (2000) defines a native speaker as follows:

Speakers are thought to appropriately use the language, know the grammar and vocabulary of the language, and possess the dominance in the rules and forms of the language. Native speaker teachers as well are presumed have more advantages in teaching their L1 in comparison to non-native speaker teachers. (Jenkins, 2000, p. 5)

Mossou (2006) provides a more detailed characteristic of the native speaker: (a) primacy in order of acquisition, (b) manner and environment of acquisition, (c) acculturation by growing up in the speech community, (d) phonological, linguistic, and communicative competence, (e) dominance, totals, and comfort of use, (f) ethnicity, (g) nationality/domicile, (h) self-perception of linguistic identity, (i) other-perception of linguistic membership and eligibility, and (j) monolingual (Mossou, 2006).

According to Longman *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* a native speaker can be defined as a person who learns language from childhood. Native speakers are said to

use language fluently, grammatically, and appropriately. However, Filipino EFL teachers working abroad can be categorized as native English speaking teachers despite English not their native language. They have learned the language from childhood and use the language fluently. This categorization is relevant to this study as they are given different roles in teaching English in the classroom from many other non-native EFL teachers.

2.3.2 EFL

The EFL stands for *English as a foreign language* means learning a language in a classroom setting. In addition, the language is used in a context where the target language is not widely used in the community. Countries like Japan, Thailand, or other Asian countries are typically non-English speaking countries.

2.3.3 Attitudes to English

Through globalization, the world today is more interconnected. It opens communication across all cultures and other nations. Longhurst (2008) describes the term as a process of intermeshing world economies, politics and culture into a global system, and ESL/EFL teachers working overseas develop the attitude of reflexivity in the classroom. Longhurst (2008) mentions that when one seeks to understand and articulate current experiences in relation to previous experiences. ESL/EFL teachers negotiate their cultural and previous experiences to the current cultural and relationships experienced in their new country.

Another effect of the use of English is the way it affects your identity. Lightbown and Spada (2006) state when two cultures interact, identities are affected. Each individual's identity changes all the time and the global spread of English in the world has also a positive impact on the learners as well as English education. There is an increase in demand to learn the English language especially in non-English speaking countries. Countries like Japan, China, Thailand and Korea hire native English-speaking teachers to teach in their schools. One implication is a shift from traditional approaches to oral communicative abilities to cultural and social awareness (Harmer, 2007).

Furthermore, World Englishes and variations of international Englishes evolve because of globalization. According to Harmer (2007) World Englishes were formerly classified as *inner*, *outer* and *expanding circle* and level now evolved to *high proficiency* and level *low proficiency* circle. These terms are defined as follows:

2.3.4 Inner, outer and expanding circle vs. proficiency and low proficiency circle

The respondents of this research are categorized as 'relatively close' to the native speaker of English. Lundahl (2009) mentions *outer circle* groups where English is an official language in the country, even though, it is not the mother tongue, such as Singapore and the Philippines. Lundahl (2009) also uses the terms *inner circle* and *expanding circle*. Countries like the United States, Britain, Australia, and etc. where English is the primary language belong to the *inner circle* category. Meanwhile, countries belonging to the *expanding circle* are countries that learn English as a foreign or secondary language. Sweden, Denmark, the Asian continent, much of Africa, and some Middle East countries, etc. fall into this category.

However, Harmer (2007) redefines the categories for the English learners where ethnicity is less important and proficiency matters more. *Proficiency circle* here is defined as learners who have sufficient knowledge of the English language and culture while *low proficiency circle* are those who have less or have no knowledge of the English language and culture. Harmer also adds that "nobody owns the English language anymore and native speakers and non-native speakers of English are alike" (Harmer, 2007, p.18).

2.3.5 Declarative and procedural knowledge

Lightbown and Spada (2006) define *declarative knowledge* as " 'knowledge that' or information that we have and know that we have. Meanwhile a *procedural knowledge* means knowledge that underlies fluent or automatic performance which also referred to as 'knowledge how' (Lightbown & Spada, 2006 p 198, 203). This means that declarative knowledge is conscious while procedural knowledge involves implicit learning, which a learner may involve being able to use a particular form to understand the target language without necessarily being able to explain it.

3. Method

This study explores how EFL teachers' perceptions of themselves with regard to their ethnic background. The study focuses particularly on their experiences as English teachers in a foreign country. So, the qualitative interview is the most suitable approach in this study. This approach is commonly used in studies such as the present one. Qualitative interview is both efficient and effective since data are collected qualitatively (Burns, 1999). Through qualitative interview method the researcher follow up on data in a detailed way. Furthermore, interviews allow particular issues to be identified, and observations to be made.

3.1 Procedures

The interviews were semi-structured. It means that sets of questions were prepared beforehand. Interview questions were in three categories: 1) the personal background: 2) personal perceptions; and 3) approaches to language learning (see appendix 1). The language used for the interview questions, and during the interview both in written and oral, was English.

Before conducting the interview, the four respondents were briefed about the interview questions. They received the preliminary questions in advance, by email, to get the context of the interview. They were also informed about the objectives of this research and lastly, they were explained about the ethics and confidentiality. The participants were anonymized to maintain the confidentiality of the respondents

During the interview there were no distractions because the informants were interviewed after school hours at a time convenient for them. Therefore, they experienced no time pressure. All four informants are familiar to the interviewer, so previous relationships were already established from both parties. These are my friends from my upper-secondary years in the Philippines. We keep constant updates of our lives through social media, so we feel comfortable in speaking to each other. This was visible in their mannerisms by showing that they were relaxed, smiled and looked straight to the camera when they answered the questions. In addition, the respondents chose to speak the English because they felt comfortable with the language. There were a few instances, and mostly utterances, where both the interviewer and the respondents code-switched their language to Visayan, our native dialect.

The interviews were done in the interviewees' own residences, thus making the respondent more at ease when they gave their views and opinions. Interviewees expressed freely their views and experiences because they were relaxed in the comfort of their homes. Questions given were in open-ended format and, this type of format allowed them to develop a flowing conversation. Questions used usually began with *what*, *how* and *why*.

Furthermore, the respondents were selected on the basis of convenience because they were accessible through Skype. They work outside Philippines as English educators. Two of the respondents work in Japan, one works in Thailand and the last one works in Qatar. After the interviews were conducted I chose to divide the results into themes. These are as follows:

3.2 Respondents' background

This section provides the educational and working experiences of the respondents as well as their learning strategies and assessments used when teaching English. The countries where they work have English as a mandatory subject in school.

The respondents of this research are four female Filipino English teachers. They are between the ages of 38-44 years old and they all chose to work in different countries within in Asia in a non English speaking country. There will be no mention of their names to keep the respondents anonymous. However, the countries where they work are mentioned to clarify and avoid confusion about their answers. These countries are Japan, Qatar and Thailand.

They all had teaching experiences from the Philippines before they decided to work outside the country. What is different with these four individuals are that they have different professional backgrounds and reasons for working overseas. These are their stories:

The first respondent works in Yokohama, Japan and, has taught English fulltime since 2008. She teaches English to 4th, 5th and 6th graders in a regular public school. She has a degree in Automotive Engineering and her teaching experience from the Philippines covers only instructional introduction to workers in a Japanese company.

The second respondent also worked in Japan for just a year. She worked in a private school in a different prefecture, Tokoshima. She taught regular classes in school with 30 to 35 students and special tutorial classes to pupils from 2 years of age up to 50 years of age. Special classes constituted 2 to 4 students per class. She is a licensed attorney and her teaching experience in

Philippines covers only the subject of psychology. She chose to work for a year in Japan as an EFL teacher because she wanted to experience Japanese culture.

The third respondent works in the western part of Asia in the Gulf region. She is a qualified teacher in English and Mathematics and, she was recruited by the Philippine Department of Education (the DepEd) to teach in the Filipino community. This means that teachers as well as pupils are all Filipino citizens.

The fourth and the last respondent for this research works in another Asian country, Thailand. She has taught in a public high school in the southern region for 3 years now. She is also a qualified teacher in the Philippines before she was recruited to work in Thailand. She lives in the school where she teaches. This school is provided and funded by the city government.

3.3 Skype

Video chat through Skype was used for the interviews and was carried out in their own homes. The video captures their natural verbal utterances and interaction (facial and body). Visual contact is important for the interview, since this covers non-verbal behavior such as the movements of their hands, head and their upper body. To make the interview through Skype more reliable, transcripts and audio recording were also used (Burns, 1999). Notes were taken to complement the digital recording. During the later part digital recordings were transcribed in order to help the interviewer re-evaluate the interview needed for analyses. The duration of the interview time was between 43-57 minutes and, the dates of the interviews were made in the month of September 2013 in the week 37 and 38.

There are advantages in using Skype video chat. According to Kazmer & Xie (2008), Skype is a free and easy-to-use program that is available to those who have internet access whether it is through your mobile phone, PC or tablet. Secondly, researchers can easily collect data in any corners of the world (geographic flexibility). Lastly, Skype has many built in functions like instant messaging, video and audio recording, saves your messaging history so data collected are not lost.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Interview via Skype was different from other interview situations since the interviewer and the respondent are physically separated from each other (Giddens, 1990). It is a virtual space where questions or newly acquired knowledge are ethically questioned. This criticism refers to the

physical distance of the interviewer and interviewees are not usual. Normal interviews happen in one formal place and at a certain time. Kazmer & Xie (2008) also mention that there are technical problems in using Skype. Sometimes the internet connection is slow and this makes the audio work at slower speed. This can break the flow of the interview and that could also make the video chat to fail. Then there is the possibility to restart the connection so, non-verbal communication is lost.

However, Nalita and Busher (2007) mentions that online interview research like Skype can be used as long as the research ensures that the society can benefit from the results and, that the research is carried out with balance and does more good to society than harm.

Another ethical consideration is the selection of the respondents. Vetenskaprådet (3:2011) states that close relationships of the interviewer and the interviewees creates complications in the research study. The interviewees may answer the questions too much or too little like they may answer the questions in too friendly manner and too many unnecessary friendly comments. Seidman (2006) added that interviewing the people that you know may limit the full potential of the results because the interviewees could give incomplete answers to the questions. In both cases, the researcher's position can entail ethical complications or risks.

However, my selected respondents in this research answered the questions adequately and in a formal yet relaxed manner. Thus, the data gathered gave good and positive results.

4. Results and analysis

The results of the interview are presented in categories, namely the description of the schools where the respondents work, English as foreign language used in the school, the teaching strategies used and experienced by the respondents, and finally, advantages and disadvantages of working abroad. The respondents also shared their insights about the native speaker ideal and perceptions of what an English teacher is. And the results are used to differentiate and point out limitations of the former research.

4.1 Description of the schools

The countries where the respondents work are in Asia. During the interview process, the respondents were asked about their school curriculum. All of the respondents said that English is a mandatory subject in the curriculum. However, English exists at different levels. The second respondent from Japan explained that “English is part of the curriculum in grade school”

(Respondent 2, 2013). Moreover, the first respondent from Japan answered the question like this:

A good thing in Japan is that English is not a regular subject except in grade 5, grade 6 and up. It became a mandatory subject in 2011[...] so grade 5 and 6 do not get grades but they are evaluated through this system called passport. The kids themselves write their comments and teacher will check that. (Respondent 1, 2013)

The respondent from Qatar replied that their curriculum is based on the Philippine model. She further explained that their curriculum is under the Philippine Department of Education or DepEd. She added that the Philippine schools are now doing the Kto12 Program which refers to the mandate that all kids attend Kindergarten.

Meanwhile the respondent from Thailand answered that "the school has a different system here. High school is 6 years, junior high school is 3 years and senior high school is another 3 years" (Respondent 2, 2013). With regards to curriculum, Thailand's curriculum has similarities to both the Philippine school curriculum and the Japanese as well. For instance, Thailand and the Philippines are similar because the English language is mandatory on all levels, and English as a subject is graded. Thailand is also similar to Japan in the learning approach where English as a subject is delegated to two teachers. The local or native Thai teachers are assigned to do the writing

and reading comprehension while the foreign teachers are assigned the task of teaching speaking and listening.

All the four countries have English as a mandatory subject in their curriculum. English as a subject in both Japan and Thailand is introduced in learners early school years. However, it is different in Qatar because the third respondent works in the Filipino community school and English is used as their first medium of communication in school. Furthermore, these countries mentioned have different school curricula, have different approaches to teaching the target language and have different criteria for grading their pupils. In Japan for example, pupils are not graded in the early years of learning unlike in Qatar and Thailand pupils are graded.

4.2 English as foreign language

The respondents were asked about the importance of English learning to their pupils. They all replied that learning the English language is their schools first foreign language of choice. Their school even hires native English-speaking teachers or best representative foreign teachers who speak fluent English to teach in their English classrooms. Their pupils only practice and learn the language mostly in the English classroom and aside from there, the first respondent from Japan replied:

We actually have a class called "International Understanding" [...] and every year the school invites native speaker from other countries [...] it maybe Asian for example, a native speaker from Thailand, Singapore or European like British. No Americans because they are already learning it from the regular English class. (Respondent 1, 2013)

By inviting native speakers from different countries to their schools is a unique approach in learning languages and cultures. For example in Japan, kids are learning other foreign languages including English even in different variants like British RP or Scottish English. Countries like Japan and Thailand in this study considers American English class their regular English variant.

The respondents from Qatar observed her students speaking fluent English and said that "kids here can speak English well because they are all trained at home" (Respondent 3, 2013). These are the Filipino children born in Qatar. Their parents work in Qatar and they put their children in a Filipino community school which adopts the Philippine Educational system and uses English as the language of communication. This means that learning the language is based on to the educational

system in the Philippines. English is not only a subject but the medium of instruction in school as well.

Meanwhile the respondent from Thailand replied that foreign teachers like her, teach only teach only listening and speaking skills whereas the writing and reading part are delegated to the Thai English teachers. Similar to Japan, learning English in Thailand is compulsory, too. And students also learn English mainly in the classroom. The classes are provided with two English teachers, one who is a native English-speaking teacher or close representative to a native English speaker like the respondents. While the other teacher, is a local born teacher whose job is to assist the foreign teacher.

Countries like Japan and Thailand hire foreign English teachers, preferably from English speaking countries to teach their pupils to learn the target language, except in Qatar where English language is compulsory in all their subjects. This indicates that native speakers of English are in higher regard than the non-native speakers of English. Similar to Arva and Medgyes (2000) and Cook (2007), the respondents mentioned that native speakers of English have more knowledge of their culture and are more competent phonologically, linguistically and communicatively.

However, there are pedagogical challenges and benefits in teaching abroad. Similar to Cook's (2007) study, the respondents from Thailand and Japan mentioned that they gained new friends and a wider cultural awareness of their new country. However, the respondents' knowledge of the local culture and language are insufficient that these are also their downside in communicating their pupils and parents. So, foreign teachers like them were provided with local teachers to assist them.

4.3 Teaching strategies

When asked about their approach to teaching English, the respondents from Japan and Thailand stated that English teachers that teach speaking and listening skills are all foreigners. Their responsibilities are limited because there is another teacher in the class assigned to perform classroom control and this is sometimes seen as a negative experience in teaching. The first respondent from Japan said:

We have an agreement between the board of Education and our school so our priority is to establish an interest in learning English. (Respondent 1, 2013)

She also explained how English classes are done. She said that steps taken are that:

You drill them with vocabulary and once the pupils get used to these words you apply the target language then you apply them to games or work in pairs. (ibid, 2013)

The second respondent from Japan answered that it depends on the student's English level and age. She then described her teaching strategy through individual interaction between her students. "We just talk, read some articles and then interaction" Respondent 2, 2013). She further mentioned her preference of teaching materials from the American Embassy where she believes is better than that of the one provided in school. She prefers to use her own materials it gives more room to creativity.

Respondent from Qatar mentions her approach to grading and assessing her pupils and said that "I grade them summative and written and verbal instructions are all in English" (Respondent 3, 2014). Unlike respondents from Japan mention that students are only assessed by their performance.

The result shows that respondents wanted to establish interest in learning English to their pupils. They teach their learners by drilling them with vocabulary, game exercises, reading text and speaking interaction. These learners were just beginners so repetition is important in learning the target language. Harmer (2007) states that imitating the words help the learners transfer knowledge. When the learner relates the function and form then the learner have the better chance to remember these words.

Respondents in Japan and Thailand mentioned that their teaching strategies were limited to speaking and listening. Hayes (2009) and Cook (2007) pointed out in their study that the local English teachers had better skills in grammar, reading and writing because local teachers themselves in one time and went in the same process in learning the English language. This means that local teachers have procedural knowledge whereas the foreign teachers have declarative knowledge. The respondents knew have better knowledge of the English culture while the local English teachers have explicit knowledge about the language.

4.4 Advantages in working abroad

Midway through the interview the informants were asked about the advantages of working abroad. Respondent 1 from Japan mentioned that In Japan, they are not strict. The word strict here refers to the qualification to teach. She further added that the parents themselves request to open an English class for their kids.

In the matter of their role as English teachers, the first respondent from Japan mentioned about their duties as teachers are lighter in Japan and teaching is easy because "you don't talk the whole 45 minutes. If you talk the whole time, then pupils will never understand you" (Respondent 3, 2013).

Another advantage for Filipinos working overseas is the access to modern equipments. The respondent from Qatar mentioned that that each student is provided with an individual laptop and every classroom has a LCD projector. The second respondent from Japan also mentioned another advantage which is having the additional teachers in the classroom. She said that "I have two assistants they do not entrust it to me" (Respondent 2, 2013). The word *it* refers to discipline. The first respondent from Japan explained further and said that:

The advantage here in Japan, we are not in-charge of classroom control. The Japanese takes care of classroom control. (Respondent 1, 2013)

With regards to salary the second respondent from Japan said that salary in Japan is twice it is twice the salary paid in the Philippines. She also mentioned about social contacts that:

There are many Filipino teachers. That is the reason why I am here because one of my friends used to teach here before. I even have a cousin who owns a private school. (Respondent 2, 2013)

Lastly the respondent from Thailand also mentioned money. She said that they pay more and the standard of living is cheaper. Also she "is happy to say that my students like me very much" (Respondent 4, 2013).

The result shows that there are many advantages in working abroad; first there is no strict requirement in working as an English teacher. Respondents from Japan explained that being a fluent English speaker was sufficient enough. One of the respondent got her job because the referral from the parents of her daughter's classmates and even organized a class for her to teach. Secondly, teaching roles is lighter where the respondents focus on speaking and listening communication skills. Local teachers in the schools are in were given the task of classroom control. However this is not the case in Qatar as the teacher and students are from the same culture. This means there is no language barrier.

The major motivation for these four respondents to work abroad is the higher wage compared to the Philippines. Similar to the Bolton and Bautista (2004) and Ubalde (2007), the result shows the economic problems in the Philippines forced the respondents to work abroad. Salary abroad is

usually twice as much as the regulated salary in Philippines. Working abroad pays off compare to staying in the Philippines. In addition, the teachers in this research also are provided with housing.

Another advantage of working abroad concerns the access to modern technology. Three out of four respondents mentioned that all classrooms are well provided with modern equipment. The respondent replied that her school is situated in a rural area and it is not even accessible to any 4-while drive. However she is with an assistant. Similar in Japan, they had local teachers that assisted them, too. These local teachers secured order in the classroom. This helped the respondents to concentrate on their language teaching. Lastly, the benefits in working abroad are gaining a wider social network. There are many Filipinos working as English teachers so, there is social access to new people, culture and language. Furthermore, there are many Filipinos in the country that they are in so, they meet new friends and get help from the fellow Filipinos living in these countries.

4.5 Disadvantages of working abroad

When asked about disadvantages in working abroad the language issue came up. The second respondent from Japan said that she often encountered problems with the native language. She tried to find another solution in order for her students to understand her "like I use my body language to explain"(Respondent 2, 2013). The respondent from Thailand used another approach. She researched the words because if she sometimes mispronounced a word or spoke the language incorrectly" they laugh at me" (Respondent 4, 2013). The word they in this context are her students.

Meanwhile the respondent from Qatar has no problems in getting her message across to her pupils and points out that "so far I like it here but, this is my first time working abroad so I feel homesick"(Respondent 3, 2013).

When asked about cultural differences, the respondent from Thailand answered "they bring baby powder. They want to be presentable and they want to be white like the Americans" (Respondent 4, 2013). The respondent from Thailand also added "they (the Americans) are considered attractive and are paid higher, but nobody knows what they are teaching" (Respondent 4, 2013). The statement attractive here means there are good incentives offered to Americans to work in Thailand.

The results in this research show differences in culture and language. This is in line with Arva and Medgyes' (2000) study that Native English speakers are given better incentives and are paid at a

higher rate compared to the local English teachers because of their ethnicity and not for their proficiency in the English language. More often the respondents are dependent on other local teachers. They sometimes ask for assistance in translating English to the learners' native tongue in their activity instructions. . However, these respondent failures to help the learners with their grammar limited the learning outcome of their student. My respondents felt misunderstood because of their lack of knowledge of the local language. Hayes (2007) claims that teachers used strategies which seem appropriate for them and these four respondents are committed to their teaching and this serves as a counter- balance to their lack of knowledge.

The respondent in Thailand tried to speak their language and she was laughed at for her pronunciation of their language. Filipino teachers in Japan and Thailand solve the language barrier through the use of their body language when they could not explain in words.

4.6 Native speaker ideal

During the last part of the interview the respondents were asked about their perceptions of the Native speaker. Respondent 1 from Japan said that Filipino English is neutral "it is very understandable and easy to follow"(Respondent 1, 2013). On the other hand respondent 2 from Japan answered that "there is no particular accent but you know Filipinos, we use the American English" (Respondent 2, 2013).

The respondent from Qatar could not determine which accent is dominant and said "I think ours is based on American but Qatar uses more British" (Respondent 3, 2014).The respondent from Thailand answered that British is the preferred accent and replied that "historically, Thailand was under British colony" (Respondent 4, 2013). However, Thailand was never colonized by any foreign country but, Britain had a great influence in trading around this region as a neighboring country Malaysia was part of the British Commonwealth.

Respondents had varied perceptions of what a native speaker of English is. They could not determine which a dominant variant of English but they all had similar preferences and that is the American English variant. The dominance of the American English in both culture and media indicates their preferences (Bolton and Bautista, 2004). However, Harmer (2007) states about the global English that English language belong to anyone who speaks the language. This reflected to

one of the respondent mentioned the neutrality of her English accent allowed her pupils to understand her clearly and her pronunciation easier to follow.

The native speaker perceptions are conflicting and divide the person's identity through their ethnicity. This will just give a 'we-they' categorization. Lundahl (2009) further categorized the countries according to inner, outer and developing circle.

4.7 English teacher ideals

Lastly, concerning on the questions of their personal view of what an ideal teacher is, the second respondent from Japan replied that "a good language teacher is able to teach the language [...] but what is important to me is that they can express themselves" (Respondent 2, 2013). The first respondent from Japan was also asked the same questions and she replied:

A good language teacher is one who after class can hear students keep repeating their songs, chants and target language that for me is an affirmation that they're learning something and that they enjoy what they've learned. (Respondent 1, 2013)

The results show that only two respondents had clear opinion of what a good teacher is. That is to teach and for the students to learn and enjoy in learning the target language. The other two respondents were unsure about the question so they did not answer. Native speakers of English are assumed to be best teacher in teaching English because they have the ability cultural knowledge and are fluent in speaking English. However result shows similarity to Arva and Medgyes (2000) and Cook (2007) study that non native English teachers are equally good teachers. The downside of being native English speaking teachers is the linguistic gap with learners because they lack the local exposure of the local language and culture. However, the local teachers' task is to help their learners with their specific problem.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine the positive attitudes and experiences of EFL teachers working in a foreign country. The results show that working as EFL teacher in a foreign country has advantages and limitations. The respondents in question were aware of being better qualified to teach English than local English teachers, but also that they consider themselves in some respect better equipped to teach English than native speakers of English. However, being foreigners in the country they work has limitations in regards to teaching roles and cultural gaps.

5.1 Implication for Sweden

From an Asian perspective, it is not often easy for the Asians to understand and appreciate other foreign cultures, ethnicities and lifestyles. Asians are not accustomed to interacting with other ethnic groups since most of these countries are homogeneous. Although, there are many tribes who speak with different dialects they have the same nationality and race. This is different from the situation in most western countries. Particularly in the big cities, the communities are multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multicultural. This aspect (multiculturalism) is an important factor in global education and in a practical sense allows the student to realize and recognize the reality of cultural diversity. In Sweden, the society comprises a mixture of different ethnic groups and society tries to shape it towards diversity and tries to include everybody. The school curriculum is even designed to cater the needs and concerns of the multicultural students. For instance the Swedish curriculum incorporates other varieties of texts, cultures of English. Moreover, one of the core values in Swedish Curriculum is the internationalisation of Swedish society and increased mobility. This means encouraging people to live and appreciate other cultures (Skolverket, 2011).

Learning the English language develops teachers' knowledge and opportunities and understanding of social and cultural contexts where English is used. Similar to Japan, Qatar and Thailand, Sweden is a country where English is not a first or second language. So, English is a mandatory subject in schools. However, most teachers in Swedish often work alone in the

classroom. Their task is to teach the English language and culture in all the four communicative skills namely, reading, listening, speaking and writing.

Furthermore, English teachers in Sweden combine both implicit and explicit in learning the target language. Even the students themselves develop and acquire the English language both implicitly and explicitly. Benefits here in Sweden are that students get more information outside the classroom and get formal learning in inside the classroom. This is different from the countries where the respondents of this research work. Their students learn mostly two communicative skills (listening and speaking). Their pupils generally learn the language only in the classroom and in a limited time.

For Swedish learners, their exposure to English in and outside the language classroom this allows them to increase their awareness of English culture and other different cultures, ethnicities and other countries in the world. Besides, English is the *lingua franca* in modern technology. Moreover, English dominates pop culture and media. In this regard, as a future teacher, we should educate our learners in global awareness. English should be taught in an international context.

Similar to Filipinos, there are also many graduates of teaching program who choose to work abroad. Their motivation to work abroad is not for better economic benefits rather cultural experiences and wider social networking.

5.2 The native speaker ideal

Finally, Johnson (1990) mentions a good teaching is a creative process which demands constant injection of new information, new perspectives, and new energy. Good learning depends on good teaching. Results show that parents and pupils prefer native English speaking teachers because these countries are ethnically homogenous. Homogenous in the sense that all pupils in class belong to one ethnic group so their government encourages their schools to introduce foreign language and culture awareness program. And the best way to learn is through the native speaker of the language. Similar to Cook's (2007) study native-speakers have the best knowledge of the language and culture.

A native speaker of Swedish or English knows the target language implicitly but not the non-native speakers. In addition, native speakers make many grammatical mistakes while non-native speakers' declarative knowledge is limited. English is taught as a foreign language at an early age

here in Sweden and majority of the English teachers are native Swedes. However, there are also small numbers of non Swedes teaching English in Sweden, and I belong to that category. I am a Filipino born English student teacher here in Sweden and my ethnicity is instantly noticed.

This practice of giving higher value to native English speaker in non English speaking countries should change. Schools should focus more about the proficiency of the ESL/EFL teachers and not on ethnicity. This creates us and *them* issue where teachers and students are categorized us native English speaker against non native English speaker.

Arva and Medgyes (2000) claim that an ideal English teacher is someone who should be hired based on their professional skills, not on their language background. No one was born to be a teacher. It is special education or training that makes good teachers. However, teachers' knowledge to the local language is an advantage. Not only it gives an advantage in explaining the grammar but also share the learning experience of the target language with the pupils.

In conclusion, this research explored how some EFL teachers' perceive their roles as teachers, their teaching strategies and their experiences of working abroad. The results show that there are many downsides and benefits in working abroad. These teachers experienced the chance to broaden their cultural awareness by working abroad. They also acquired economic gained and wider social contacts. However, the downside in working abroad is the limitation of their teaching responsibilities and their dependency to the local teachers. These respondents also felt their lack of knowledge to the local language and culture led to miscommunication.

Their responsibilities were only through speaking and listening communication skills and their school curriculum emphasizes the language and cultural awareness of the target language. The learners as well as parents had positive attitudes towards learning English and towards them as EFL teachers. Students are motivated to learn by actively participating in class. However, learning English only happens in the English classroom so their experiences and knowledge of the English language and culture are limited or their knowledge of the target is low and limited.

The choice of the method used in this research is appropriate and practical. It managed to gather relevant insights from EFL teachers working abroad. However, the respondents of this research are all Filipinos and all female of gender. It would be interesting to conduct a follow up to know the insight from the other sex preference, a respondent who does not have a close relationship to the interviewer and also respondents who have another nationality from the interviewer. It would be also interesting to know if there are major effects on the results on the insights and experiences in working abroad. Will there be another teaching strategies used to motivate the learners.

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Attachment 1

The Interview Schedule

Background

What is your current location? What motivates you to reach there?

Tell me about yourself and your university degree.

How many years of teaching experience have you had?

What were the requirements when you applied as a teacher there?

English Classroom

Describe the school you are in.

What year are you teaching?

How old are the pupils and how much do they know about English already?

Do you speak English all the time or do you explain to them in the students' native language?

Teaching Strategies

In your teaching, have experienced language barrier challenges?

What are the positive and negative things you have experienced?

Do you focus on American or British English?

What is your idea of a good language teacher?

Attachment 2

These are the transcribed passages used in the text and put into context.

Selected Transcriptions for Informant 1

Filipino English teacher 1 working in Yokohama, Japan

Date and duration of the interview: 2013-09-14 from 01.24-02.14

03.55 I: Tell me about your school. Is it public or private?

I1: It is a public elementary school.

I: How do you evaluate the kids?

I1: A good thing in Japan English is not is not a regular subject except in grade 5, grade 6 and up. It became a mandatory subject last 2011. So grade 5 and 6 don't get grades but they are evaluated like (short pause) they have this system called passport.

I: Yeah?

I1: The kids themselves write their comments and teacher will check that. And here they do not receive in elementary. They only receive letters. A for excellent and

I: (interrupts) we have that, too. Our grading is from A to E.

05.11 I: Is English their second language of choice or do they have other languages?

I1: Actually they have a class this International Understanding.

I: Hmm

I1: Yes. Every year they have native speaker from other countries (pause) it maybe Asian like Thailand or Singapore or European like British. Not American because they are already learning it from the regular English class.

I: Really? Is that a one year requirement?

I1: Yes. They have IU every year so different teachers aside from the regular English teacher. So they have English class an IU class.

04.20I: Do you follow guidelines or school plan?

I1: Actually (pause) we have an agreement the board of Education and our school so; the first on what we are emphasizing is to established children's interest to learn English. Because they have never spoken it, right?

I: Yes.

I1: So they need the interest to study and participate in the classes.

I: Yeah true.

I1: You drill with vocabulary. Once they get used to them you applied the target language. They simply answer *I like dogs. I like cats*. Then you apply them to games or go into pairs or work this into groups.

07.26 I: How come you chose to teach English when you are an ECE engineer?

I1: No. Automotive Engineering in Philippines for 8 years. But my daughter xx went to school at 3 years old.

I: Were you given a requirement from schools that you should take seminar?

I1: In Japan, they don't'. They are really not that strict. Let see, it was the parents request and who invited other parents to open an English class.

10.01I: Did you encounter some barriers?

I1: Teaching elementary is easy because you don't talk the whole 45 minutes. If you talk, they will never understand you. English is never spoken in their homes.

I: Have they have access to English outside school?

I1: Yes. That's the good thing about Japanese system is that they have the technology. They have the media. And what the advantage here in Japan (pause) we are not in charge on the classroom control. The Japanese takes care of the classroom control.

I: Good.

I1: What I do is just teach English

14.53I: Are you identified to a specific accent?

I1: Do I mimic other accent? Actually, I speak my Filipino accent because we are, we are known to be neutral and, it is very understandable and easy to follow.

I: Good.

I1: Sometimes of course, I have to say it neutrally because kids mimic your accent.

16.05 I: What is your idea of a good language teacher? How do other teachers see you?

I1: A good language teacher is when after the class the students keep repeating your songs, chants and your target language that for me is an affirmation that they are learning something and that they enjoy what they've learn. For me if a teacher was able to get that interest. That is good enough for me.

I: What about other teachers?

I1: I think the main point is the language should be for communication.

Attachment 3

Selected Transcriptions for Informant 2

Filipino English teacher 2 working in Osaka, Japan

Date and duration of the interview 2013-09-15 from 23.11-23.53

12.41I: Tell me your experiences there with other teachers?

I2: There are many Filipino teachers here. That is why I am here because of my friend used to...In grade school, my subject English is part of the curriculum in grade school. And I have 2 assistants.

I: Assistants?

I2: Yeah. Because, you know, in English class and the way they discipline is different...

08.40I: What types of methods do you use in teaching? How about in your activities?

I2: It depends on the student's English level and age. I actually teach from 2 years old and to 50 years old.

I: 50 years old?

I2: Yeah. We do it one on one. We just talk, talk, read some articles and then interaction.

13.42 I: Do you have books and school policies to follow?

I2: Actually, I have my own materials. They have actually books but I use my own. You need creativity of how you can make use out of those materials

15.15 I: But the audio where you want the kids to listen to a conversation

I2; No, no particular accent but you know Filipinos, we follow the American English and the books are actually from the US. Actually, I usually buy all my books from the US embassy.

I: Ahaa

I2: Yes from the American Embassy. You see my TESL teacher, she is from America and she always recommends book.

12.32 I: Assistants?

I2: Yeah. Because, you know in English class and the way they discipline the students is different. I don't know. They don't entrust it to me because it is not my job. I don't know how but they have different style of disciplining students

05:24 I: How much is the salary?

I2: It is twice of the teaching salary in Philippines.

I: if you compare your work in Philippines and Japan. Do you feel happy working there?

I2: Yeah. Actually I like Japan but I need to go back to Philippines because I need to complete my MCLE and I miss my family.

13:28 Tell me your experiences there with other teachers?

There are many Filipinos teachers. That is the reason why I am here because one of my friends used to teach here before. I even have a cousin who owns a private school here.

11:03 I: In your teaching there, do you encounter some challenges?

I2: I teach on English. When you do not understand I use my body language. I have somebody with me for the pre-school. I have 2 teachers with me but for special classes. I work alone.

14:07 I: Do you have distinctive accent like British or American?

I2: Actually no. I have good students and I never understand Japanese. I do not think they can distinguish the accents. But if I'm teaching the adults I do accents but for the regular class, I speak normally Filipino English accent.

I: But the audio you want the kids to listen to a conversation?

I2: No, no particular accent but you knows we Filipinos we follow the American English.

20:03I: Good or Ideal teacher..

I2: Able to teach the language (pause). Do you want me to expand more?

I: Yes! Or how about other teachers view

I2: On the school... you know it is me who decide how and what to teach. It is left to my discretion.

I: No negative feedback on it?

I2: I don't know. I never heard anything. What is important and a good teacher is that they can express themselves.

Attachment 4

Selected Transcriptions for Informant 3

3. Filipino English teacher working in Qatar

Date and duration of the interview 2013-09-16 from 14.51-15.38

09.53 I: How about the curriculum?

I3: Curriculum is patterned to the Philippines. We are actually under the DepEd. So we are now doing the Kto12 Program”.

I: the Kto12?

I3: Actually its newly implemented.

15.20 I: How about the English language?

I3: Some kids who came here at age but I noticed that kids born here can speak English well because they are all trained at home.

18.32 I: When you give the instruction, do you translate?

I3: No English all the time.

I: Strategy

I3: Yes I grade them summative and written and verbal instructions are all in English.

08.23 I: Do your school provide the materials?

I3: We have to do our own materials in teaching and we are given allowance for the materials before the school year. For the school supplies, we are provided by the school.

We have our own individual laptop and every classroom have LCD projector.

16.35 I: Do you like working there?

I3: So far I like it here. This is my first time to work abroad so I feel homesick.

13.52 I: Is their English there patterned to British or American?

I3: I cannot determine but actually I think ours is patterned to American but Qatar does more British. Maybe, this is because we Filipino were under the American.

Attachment 5

Selected Transcriptions for Informant 4

Filipino English teacher working in Thailand

Date and duration of the interview 2013-09-20 from 16.38 17.26

03.12 I: What level are you teaching?

I4: Now? Now?

I: Yes

I4: It is a different system here. High school has 6 years. Junior High school is 3 years and Senior High school is another 3 years.

18.48 I: So negative experience in teaching?

I4: I teach conversation only and it is graded. And we have a Thai teacher who teaches grammar.

I: They are separate?

I4: Yes. Foreign teachers teach only listening and speaking. Writing and reading are to the Thai.

06.27 I: How did you end up teaching there?

I4: The money value is higher and the standard of living is cheaper. I work in Philippines before teaching here.

13.56 I: Do you have somebody to help you?

I4: Nobody. I research and If I speak their language, they laugh at me. (Pause) They have four intonations for the same word but have different meanings.

22.02 I: Culture difference, intonations or language

I4: I see students bringing baby powder. They want to be presentable and they wanted to be white like the Americans.

I: Do you have American teachers there?

I4: Yes. They are attractive here and they are paid higher but nobody knows what they are teaching.

16.32 I: Why is their pattern or accent they like there?

I4: In history, Thailand was under British colony.