

Cultural Adaptation in Practice: A Multi-Case Study of Filipino Teachers in a New Zealand Play-Based Preschool

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ABSTRACT

In a world that is becoming increasingly connected, there is always a need to adapt to different cultures when teachers relocate for work. This research employs a qualitative, multi-case study, examining the experiences of two Filipino early childhood teachers who transitioned from the Philippine education system to a play-based, bicultural early childhood setting in Auckland, New Zealand. Through semi-structured interviews and observations, the study explored the teachers' challenges, strategies, and adaptations that they went through to adjust to the new curriculum, learning approaches, and diverse environment. Migration motivations and life transitions, professional and pedagogical transformation, cultural adaptation in a multicultural context, supports and resilience, and professional growth are the five major themes that emerged in this study, using thematic analysis. Findings indicate that migration was motivated by aspirations for work-life balance and family well-being, while adaptation required significant shifts in professional identity, teaching philosophy, and cultural competence. Participants go through the adaptation process with the help and support of colleagues, administration, and personal support system. The study examines the gradual and continuous dynamics of professional growth, emphasizing the importance of tailored induction, mentorship, and professional development to support overseas-trained teachers. For both policy and practice in early childhood education, the results are very important. They show that there is a need to acknowledge the unique personal strengths and attributes of migrant teachers, as well as address the obstacles and issues associated with their adaptation. Conducting the study with a small group of participants and a limited context indicates the necessity for further research using a broader participant demographic and an extended duration.

Keywords: Early childhood education, Filipino ECE teachers, multi-case study, Auckland, New Zealand.

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Introduction

The ability to adjust effectively to a new culture has become increasingly important for individuals who are relocating abroad for work, education, or permanent reasons in the current globalized world (Huff et al., 2021). Teachers are motivated to work overseas by a sense of curiosity and satisfaction in being selected for the opportunity (Toraman

et al., 2020). To fit in with the host country, one needs to be flexible and culturally sensitive to other cultures, which means one should be able to easily relate to and understand them (Han, 2022). Being interculturally competent also helps instructors understand, adapt to, and do well in the varied backgrounds and language settings that their learners are in. This competency includes the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to work well in a classroom with students

from many different cultures and languages (Dzerviniks et al., 2024). Getting accustomed to a new workplace involves becoming accustomed to acknowledging that students come from diverse backgrounds, while also adapting and adjusting one's outlook at work (Soetjipto, 2020 cited in Ramos & Basbas, 2025).

Going abroad is a great opportunity for Filipino teachers who seek better employment, a more stable income, to provide for their families, and to experience different cultures (Deguma et al., 2022). Alicamen and Becamon (2022) say that Filipino ECE (Early Childhood Education) teachers who teach overseas can have their lives changed, as mentioned in a study conducted in Singapore. Filipinos must adapt to their social positions and conventions in their host countries to prosper, even when it is difficult and stressful (Alicamen & Becamon, 2022). In Vietnam, Filipino preschool teachers' performance is largely contingent upon their strategies and techniques. These teachers applied these acquired methods to make sure they could communicate with their pre-schoolers in a new cultural and educational situation (Pozon, 2024). Surviving in a teaching position abroad is considered a progress, despite the cultural barrier and communication challenges (Deguma et al., 2022).

Te Whāriki is the official early childhood education curriculum in New Zealand. It is built on bicultural and play-based ideals, which are like how Māori and Pākehā (NZ European) work together in New Zealand under the Treaty of Waitangi. The curriculum stresses the significance of children learning through play, supporting every aspect of development, and recognizing the cultural legacy of both Māori and non-Māori people (Williams et al., 2023). But new research shows that student teachers often do not know what "bicultural curriculum" really means (Williams et al., 2024). Overseas-trained teachers, including those from the Philippines, report difficulties in adapting to the New Zealand ECE framework's expectations regarding less structured curricula, relational practices, and cultural norms for interactions between teachers and children, as well as between teachers and whānau (family) (Education Review Office [ERO], 2020). The cost of living, housing, and professional registration processes have also been identified as major non-pedagogical barriers for international teachers in New Zealand (Education Review Office [ERO], 2020).

This multi-case study focuses on two Early Childhood Education (hereafter ECE) Teachers in an Auckland, New Zealand's play-based preschool. These teachers were overseas-trained ECE Teachers from the Philippines who migrated to New Zealand without prior experience in teaching in Aotearoa or other foreign countries. As

international teachers, they are expected to learn the local curriculum and align practices to the expectations of the New Zealand ECE context. This also includes shifting from teacher-directed to a child-led and play-based approach, and engaging in bicultural practices, which highlight the difference between the ECE systems of New Zealand and the Philippines. It is notable to investigate how these factors impact the cultural, professional, and pedagogical adaptation process of Filipino teachers in an Auckland preschool.

Numerous studies on international teacher migration and cross-cultural adaptation have emerged recently (Huff et al., 2021; Dzerviniks et al., 2024; Ennerberg & Economou, 2022; Han et al., 2022; Padadopolou et al., 2022). However, there is a deficiency of specific research examining the actual experiences of Filipino early childhood education teachers within New Zealand's distinctive pedagogical and cultural context. Many studies have looked at the educational experiences of international teachers in general or the focus was on primary or secondary school contexts (Ennerberg & Economou, 2022; Education Review Office [ERO], 2020, 2021). In ECE settings and within the Te Whāriki play-based framework, there are a lot of potential areas to dig deeper in relation to Filipino teachers. This study addresses this gap by investigating how Filipino preschool teachers adapt to the local culture and pedagogical approaches in a play-based preschool in Auckland.

The objective of this multi-case study is to examine the experiences of migrant Filipino ECE teachers, who work in a play-based preschool in Auckland, New Zealand, and how they adapt to both cultural and pedagogical contexts. This study has important implications for the ministry of education policies and support programs for overseas-qualified educators in the broader discussion on global teacher migration and cross-cultural adjustment. The findings may enhance induction, mentoring, and professional development initiatives that better assist teachers in adapting to New Zealand's play-based and bicultural ECE framework, while also acknowledging the skills and experiences that migrant educators contribute to the early childhood education sector.

Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a multi-case instrumental method to examine the cultural adaptation of migrant Filipino ECE teachers employed in a play-based ECE program in New Zealand. An instrumental case study method makes it possible to gain an in-depth awareness of a more extensive topic through a detailed analysis of particular experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this

case, we looked at cultural and educational adaptation. Each participant in the study represents a distinct case that contributes to the understanding of the broader phenomenon. The multi-case study was selected to obtain comprehensive, narrative-driven insights into the participants' lived experiences, allowing the researchers to investigate the transformation of values, pedagogical beliefs, and practices within a novel cultural and educational context. Employing multiple cases enhances the depth and validity of findings via comparative analysis, rendering this method suitable for the study's objectives.

Participants

The purposive sampling was used to identify the participants. It is a non-probability technique beneficial for conducting qualitative studies, considering that it chooses the individuals according to certain traits that are important to the study. The participants are two Filipino preschool teachers who passed the following inclusion criteria: (1) Filipino nationality; (2) trained and licensed in ECE in the Philippines; (3) migrated to New Zealand within the preceding five years; (4) currently teaching in a play-based ECE setting; and (5) no prior teaching experience in Aotearoa or other foreign nations before their present position. Using two participants made it possible to do a thorough comparison across the two cases while keeping the data manageable for a thorough qualitative analysis.

Instrument

The data were gathered utilizing two principal qualitative instruments: semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations. The semi-structured interviews were chosen to help participants talk about their own experiences honestly while also letting the researcher steer the conversations toward important topics like adapting to culture, changes in teaching methods, and how people form their identities. This format was a good mix of being consistent and flexible, which made it great for looking into complicated personal experiences. We used observations to record real-life teaching practices and behaviours in the classroom, giving us real-time proof from the setting that we could use to adapt to different cultures and teaching styles. Interviews and observations work together in offering us a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection took place in three steps: before, during, and after fieldwork. The researcher secured permission from the school administrators and participants before the collection of data. Meetings were held to build rapport while explaining the study and answering any questions about it. During the data collection phase, each participant

took part in one 60-minute semi-structured interview in a comfortable, pre-arranged venue. After the interview, each participant was observed in the learning environment on two separate occasions, each lasting around forty-five minutes, during which detailed field notes were recorded. The researcher followed up with the participants to answer any questions that came up during the observation and gave them time to reflect. After the data was collected, all the interviews were transcribed verbatim, secured in a password-protected folder, and analyzed.

Data Analysis Framework

This study employed thematic analysis to carefully examine the qualitative data, utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and nomenclature, and documentation. Thematic analysis was used to find patterns and meanings that kept coming up in the data. This helped us understand the participants' true experiences deeply and flexibly. This method allowed the researchers to compare different cases while respecting the fact that each participant's story was different. Inductive analysis of the data, driven by the research questions, led to the development of categories. This verified that results were based on what those who participated perceived, while meeting the study's goals.

Data Trustworthiness

The research complied with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ascertain trustworthiness. Credibility was created by data triangulation, employing both interviews and observations, with member verification, wherein individuals examined their transcripts to clarify or validate findings. Transferability was enhanced by providing detailed and thorough descriptions of the study's context, participants, and processes to aid readers in assessing their applicability to different contexts. By keeping detailed records of the research process and the decisions made during the analysis, an audit trail was created, making the research more reliable. Reflexive journaling improved confirmability by allowing the researchers to examine their own biases and maintain objectivity in data interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research, the participants' well-being and rights were closely observed, following ethical standards at every stage. Before any data was collected, each participant's informed consent was obtained, as well as permission from the preschool management. Their rights were explained, and they were made aware that their participation was completely voluntary. Participants involved could withdraw from the study at any time without

any consequences, and their confidentiality would be fully protected. To protect the privacy of the participants, the researchers used pseudonyms and kept all data securely stored, with access limited to the researcher. During the study, cultural sensitivity was prioritized at every stage, acknowledging and respecting the unique experiences and viewpoints of Filipino teachers employed overseas. The researchers were committed to treat their narratives with respect and diligence. The study adhered to institutional and national ethical guidelines for research to ensure responsible implementation.

Results

Using thematic analysis, five major themes emerged from the interviews with two Filipino early childhood teachers, who both migrated from the Philippines and are currently teaching in New Zealand. The major themes include migration motivations and life transitions, professional and pedagogical transformations, cultural adaptation in a multicultural ECE context, supports and resilience, and professional growth and transformation. Under professional and pedagogical transformations, the subthemes were professional identity shift, adapting to play-based learning, and curriculum adaptation and professional growth. The subthemes under support and resilience were external support, personal attitude and coping strategies.

Migration Motivations and Life Transitions

According to the participants, the reasons for their migration to New Zealand include their desire to steer clear of pressures from their work in the Philippines and for the chance to have a more stable and balanced lifestyle. They also aim for opportunities that would support personal and family well-being.

Participant 2 expressed that their family felt weary during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially because of the expectations imposed by the Department of Education (DepEd).

"During COVID, we have decided with my husband to go somewhere, like in a different country, to try a different culture, to move away from a very stressful life in DepEd."

Participant 1 explained another comparable motive based on seeking more possibilities and improved life situations, such as some relief from the difficulties of maintaining a long-distance marriage.

"Because my husband and I are in a long-distance relationship and... they told me that early childhood education and teachers are in demand, so I try to apply... So that's my motivation to come here."

Across both cases, migration was experienced as a

path toward greater security, balance, and professional fulfilment. These are conditions that they felt were difficult to attain in their Philippine teaching contexts. Despite initial uncertainty, the shift was framed in confidence, implying that New Zealand will provide a better and more sustainable future.

Professional and Pedagogical Transformation

The move from the structured, teacher-directed Philippine education system to New Zealand's child-led, play-based early childhood education spurred considerable professional and pedagogical adjustment for both teachers. They had to redefine their professional identities, adapt to play-based learning, and learn to interpret and implement Te Whāriki in their practice. This journey required not just changes in teaching methods but also modifications in thinking, reflecting their constant growth as educators in a new cultural and educational setting.

Professional Identity Shift. Both teachers reported substantial transformations in their professional identities when they moved from the structured, teacher-directed Philippine system to New Zealand's child-led, play-based ECE setting. Participant 2 pursued a career in early childhood education because of necessity.

"I didn't plan to teach preschool... but I needed to teach to stay longer in New Zealand."

Participant 1 discussed changing from a curriculum-centred approach to one that allows children greater independence and autonomy. These transformations led them to reassess their obligations and expectations as educators.

"In the Philippines, it's very traditional. Like even if I work in the kindergarten, the children are sitting on the chair listening to the teacher, less of the hands-on experience, but in here, less sitting down, more of moving, but they are still learning and it's good for their development."

Such instances display the identity shift that overseas-trained educators go through when they adjust to new professional standards.

Adapting to Play-based Learning. Adapting to play-based learning was particularly tough, as both were used to worksheets, templates, and standardised exercises. Participant 2 struggled to let go of traditional literacy techniques like broken-line writing, while Participant 1 found it difficult to organize activities based on children's interests rather than established DepEd norms. This required a change not only in practice but also in mindset.

"In my previous centre, I thought that it's okay to show them like broken lines and let them hold the pencil and let them write it. Just give them the broken lines. But in their philosophy, they are not allowed to give lines [template]."

Then we are not allowed to let them hold the pencil or let them do it naturally and then instead of writing, we use some other materials. It's not allowed to be structured." (Participant 2)

"It's hard for me to adjust to prepare my own activities based on the student's learning, because in the Philippines, we just based our activities on the Dep Ed guidelines and what do you call that the curriculum of the Dep Ed? But in here, the child's disposition and interests, that's what we should follow. And it is challenging because each child is different from one another. We cannot give like standardised tests. So yeah, we need to individualise the activity." (Participant 1) Curriculum Adaptation and Professional Growth. Learning and applying *Te Whāriki* added another layer to their transformation. Its holistic, non-prescriptive nature contrasted sharply with their previous experience, making assessment and curriculum interpretation initially overwhelming. Participant 2 recalled her first experience in doing an assessment using the NZ ECE curriculum.

"I'm still learning the Te Whāriki, the philosophy of the centre, also the making of learning stories because it's our first time to make learning stories with the kids. How will we link it to the Te Whāriki."

Participant 1 emphasised how different it was from the Philippine system:

"In the Philippines, it's like a traditional strategy, like children are sitting and you need to do the talking, but in here it's free play and child-centered."

Through professional development, observing colleagues, and writing learning stories, both teachers gradually became more confident in using *Te Whāriki* and aligning with New Zealand's child-centred philosophy.

"Slowly, I am adapting to their (NZ) curriculum and the ways we teach and with the different PD (professional development), it helps me to adjust." (Participant 2)

"I'm not really master of it, but I know the gist of what does it talk about because of the book about Te Whāriki. And I find it very easy to follow. And if you will just be child centred, then it will be very easy to understand." (Participant 1)

Cultural Adaptation in A Multicultural ECE Context

Both teachers described navigating a culturally diverse early childhood context, which differed dramatically from their experiences in the Philippines, where schools were more culturally homogeneous. Adapting to a New Zealand ECE setting with a focus on Māori culture and various cultural backgrounds necessitated learning new cultural skills.

Participant 1 cited that knowing and acknowledging the diverse culture in the classroom helped her prepare resources to be used in class. She utilized the resources available to better understand and be responsive to the cultural identity of the children.

"The Te Whāriki curriculum and the online videos available about the Te Whāriki, those are the resources that really helped me."

Participant 2 also acknowledged that differences in culture can be challenging but can be resolved through an open-communication with parents.

"There was a Chinese celebration, but there was a parent that was really mad because she doesn't want to be greeted, like happy Chinese New Year [in Mandarin]. So I'm afraid to[off] that, it's so challenging because you cannot, because you really don't know their culture. So I deal with differences by talking with the parents, like asking... Communication."

Despite the differences in cultural context, both educators accept and recognise multiculturalism and frequently learned from interacting with families.

Supports and Resilience

When combined with coping strategies like prayer, research, and consultation, personal qualities like resilience, adaptability, collaboration, and openness allowed them to overcome obstacles and cultural boundaries.

External Support. Having helpful co-workers, centre management, and Filipino peers made their adjustment much easier. These groups of people helped and supported teachers grasp cultural norms, what was expected of them in the classroom, and gave them a sense of belonging. Participant 1 found comfort in having Filipino co-workers she could relate with: *"Colleagues and Filipino friends supported me."* Participant 2 also appreciated the professional development provided by her centre: *"Management gave us training... even free first aid training."*

Personal Attitude. Adapting to Early Childhood Education in New Zealand places a strong emphasis on personal attitudes like resilience, openness, and flexibility, which they believe are deeply rooted in Filipino cultural values. These attributes make it easier to deal with challenging co-workers or managers. Participant 1 believed that Filipinos' attitudes allow them to adapt quickly to any environment.

"I think the Filipinos' attitude of resilience and being open and flexible with anything that goes through life. Like you will have challenging colleagues, challenging supervisors. I'm not saying that I have it now, but most of the people, like in my previous one, we have those struggles; but

Filipinos are very resilient. I think the values that we got from art culture helped me really adapt here."

Participant 2 noted that being a good team player matters more than intelligence in her adaptation process.

"I think I believe in ECE, the most important one is that it doesn't matter on how smart you are, how intelligent you are, what matters most is how you connect with being a team player. Team player, because in ECE it's not only about you being a teacher, but it's all about all the teachers around. So, you gotta have to be a good team player. You know how to respect so that you will be respected as well."

Coping Strategies. Both participants dealt with challenges using strategies that include spiritual and personal coping. Prayers and pieces of advice from friends and colleagues have pushed them to overcome problems that come their way. Participant 1 shared: *"I pray to God and talk to my friends about it."* Participant 2 also shared:

"Pray. Pray. Yeah, yeah, actually, seriously, we also have because I as I said, in here, we already have like, work, life, and balance, and part of the life is the spiritual one. And then, yeah, because I have the balance already when in times of like, in times of challenges, it's the only thing that can help us. That helps us."

There are also strategies that both participants engage in to solve problems and conflicts involving cultural differences and values. Participant 1 shared: *"I did my own research. I always come to the centre prepared for the activities. I also tried to listen to some movies or Facebook videos for me to be familiarised with their (New Zealander) accent."* Participant 2 also shared: *"Just blend. Just blend to their (culture), we celebrate their different cultures, not only the Maori and everything, but all the cultures in the world."*

Professional Growth and Transformation

As the *kaiako* (teachers) acclimated to the early childhood environments in New Zealand, they noted that they were becoming more confident, attentive to cultural variations, and consistent with the values of New Zealand's ECE philosophy. Participant 1 stated that she is now more comfortable with child-led, play-based approaches.

"Before, I used to be a teacher-centred teacher, but now that I am here, I've learned to understand the holistic development of children to respect their needs, their space, and to give them time. It's just about, for me, the one thing I learned here is to respect the child."

Participant 2 stated that professional development (PD) improved her understanding of the New Zealand ECE curriculum, allowing her to successfully adjust. She said: *"Like slowly, I am adapting their curriculum and the ways*

we teach, and with the different PD, it helps me to adjust." She also talked about the cultural learning she has thus far. She shared her learning specifically in Te Reo Maori: *"I know how to count in Māori now... I learned Māori songs."*

Both educators have shown significant progress as they adjusted to New Zealand's early childhood philosophy. They gained confidence in child-led, play-based approaches and a better understanding of holistic, respectful ways of working with children. Professional development improved their understanding of Te Whāriki and Te Reo Māori, including simple language and songs. Their stories demonstrate how regular learning and reflection enabled them to become more culturally sensitive and competent *Kaiako* (teacher).

Discussion

The study's results illustrated the diverse and complex experiences of the two Filipino participants. These experiences of the early childhood educators demonstrate that their development and transformation as *kaiako* were affected by the relocation, professional and cultural adaptation, and various support systems. When one examines these five themes together, they reveal that moving is a pivotal moment in one's life and career, requiring flexibility, honesty, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Migration Motivations and Life Transitions

The participants' objectives fit with previous research showing that teachers often move abroad to avoid challenging work environments and pursue greater work-life balance and family stability (García & Weiss, 2020; Soriano et al., 2024). Push factors, including heavy workloads and inadequate assistance from the Philippine educational system, particularly regarding COVID-19, occurred in line with what other research has found about teachers getting burned out during the pandemic (Pressley, 2021). At the same time, New Zealand's teacher shortage and work-life balance reputation were important considerations for teachers to move there, similar to what has been shown in recent research on teacher mobility (Palma-Vasquez et al., 2022).

This study viewed migration not just as an actual relocation, but as a strategic life decision meant to improve the well-being and professional fulfilment of the educators. This is similar to what Calihog et al (2023) say, that teacher migration shows that educators often choose to work abroad not merely out of necessity but as a strategic decision to enhance their professional growth, personal development, and quality of life.

Professional and Pedagogical Transformation

One of the most important changes was to rethink how to teach. Transitioning out of the established educational system of the Philippines, to the play-based, and child-led curriculum of New Zealand called for the participants to change how they viewed children, teaching, and learning. This is in line with several recent studies that suggest that teachers who studied abroad have trouble adjusting to inquiry-based and emergent curricula (Yean & Ngadni, 2024; Gayon, 2025).

The participants' difficulty in giving up worksheets and instruction shows the current discussion regarding a worldwide change from conventional to play-based pedagogies (Pyle et al., 2020). The stories they tell reflect the necessity of unlearning, an idea presented in teacher socialization research where current views need to be analysed beforehand for the adaptation of new ways (Flores, 2020).

The difficulty of understanding Te Whāriki, which is a descriptive, holistic curriculum, is similar to what recent research has found about migrant teachers in New Zealand who are experiencing challenges with curriculum flexibility and evaluation procedures (Burke, 2024). Their increasing confidence by way of professional development (PD) and modelling by peers reflects the assertion that ongoing PD is essential for effective integration into play-based frameworks (Clark et al., 2021).

Cultural Adaptation in a Multicultural ECE Context

Cultural adaptation is another important area of the participants' learning. New Zealand's multicultural ECE environment demanded that educators navigate the different family expectations and cultural customs. This is different from the most homogeneous classrooms in the Philippines. Studies show that overseas-trained teachers often feel unfamiliar in culturally different settings, but they become better equipped with interaction, conversation, and guidance. (Huang et al., 2023; Chan & Ritchie, 2020).

The growing understanding of the participants about the Maori culture and their attempts to use Te Reo Māori aligned with current literature highlighting bicultural competence as vital for ECE teachers in Aotearoa (Williams et al., 2023). Their experiences, especially the difficulty of addressing cultural sensitivity, are similar to what Caingcoy (2024) determined: a culture-responsive method needs humility, communication, and constant reflection.

Supports, Attitudes, and Coping Strategies

Support systems were very important in making the participants' transition easier. Research across the globe supports that collegial relationships, managerial support,

and connections with peers greatly strengthen migrant teachers' sense of belonging and prevent work-related stress (Dwyer et al., 2023; Dzerviniks et al., 2024). Professional development, especially when tailored to the local area, is also known to be a key factor in building confidence as well as the migrant teachers' knowledge of the curriculum (Biasutti et al., 2021).

The stories that the teachers shared highlighted Filipino values like being resilient, being able to adapt, collaboration, and working together. These results align with research showing that cultural background impacts migrant teachers' responses to challenges, helping them adjust to new professional environments (Dzerviniks et al., 2024). Their reliance on prayer, reflection, and support from peers is similar to what Edara et al. (2022) found: that individual approaches to coping and religious faith can help in maintaining a person's well-being in challenging situations or environments, such as migration.

Professional Growth and Transformation

Both participants showed more confidence in supporting and facilitating play-based, and child-led learning in their classes. This is in line with the research of Yan (2021), noting that migrant teachers can adjust to new teaching philosophies when guided by mentoring and reflective practice. The competency of the migrant teachers is shown through the learning and application of the Te Reo Māori skills, and is in line with the literature that defines bicultural practice as an ongoing process of learning (Williams et al., 2025).

Based on what the teachers shared, professional transformation does not occur in a singular progression but instead gradually develops over time. With learning reflections, advice from other colleagues, and ongoing professional learning development, migrant teachers can become culturally competent *kaiako* who can follow New Zealand's ECE principles. This development supports the view that moving to new settings could encourage the growth of professional identity and provide new insight into teaching (Romijn et al., 2021; Yip et al., 2024; Khoo et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This multi-case study highlighted the motivations of the Filipino early childhood teachers in migrating from the Philippines to New Zealand as well as their professional and pedagogical transitions, cultural adaptation, support network, resilience, and overall growth within the ECE play-based context. Their voices were focused on understanding how overseas teachers navigate personal and professional change in a new educational and cultural environment.

The findings indicate that migration was primarily motivated by the pursuit of improved work–life balance, professional sustainability, and family well-being, conditions that participants perceived as increasingly difficult to achieve in the Philippine education system. Both teachers experienced considerable changes professionally in their identities as they transitioned from a structured and teacher-centred approach to New Zealand’s child-led and play-based pedagogy guided by Te Whāriki. Adapting to a new culture is an on-going learning process, especially in multicultural classrooms and bicultural expectations. Support and guidance from co-workers, management, professional learning development, and, alongside personal qualities like resiliency, adaptability, teamwork, and spirituality, played a crucial role in gaining confidence over time and adjusting successfully.

There are several lessons learned from this multi-case study. The experiences of the participants illustrate that the adaptation of migrant teachers is a step-by-step process that needs time, guidance, and reflective practice. To fully engage with play-based, child-centred pedagogy does not only involve learning new skills but also letting go of teaching beliefs and philosophies that have been deeply rooted in their prior educational systems. Supportive work environment, culture, and professional learning development made the transition noticeably easier. Meanwhile, the teachers’ culturally grounded values are considered an advantage in enhancing collaboration, perseverance, and professional relationships within ECE settings. At a broader stage, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on teacher migration by highlighting the experiences of Filipino ECE teachers, a group that is not well represented in research within New Zealand.

The findings validate existing theories on the ever-changing identity of teachers, influenced by sociocultural and educational contexts. Additionally, it also points out the importance of having induction, mentoring, and culturally responsive leadership to support overseas-trained teachers, seeing them as both resource assets and professionals managing complex and ongoing transitions.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study has contributed important insights into the adaptation process of the Filipino early childhood educators in New Zealand, but significant limitations have also been acknowledged. There were only two teachers involved, so the results may not be true for other cases. Their experiences may not be the same as those of other Filipino or migrant teachers in other places due to their diverse backgrounds. The study was conducted in one early childhood centre in

Auckland, which may be different from the other centres in New Zealand or elsewhere. Dependence on interviews could be influenced by selective memory or a desire to look good. This study is an overview of the adaptation at a particular point in time; it does not demonstrate the way it transforms over time. The perspectives of migrant teachers were incorporated, while the views of leaders, colleagues, or family members were excluded, leading to an incomplete comprehension of the adaptation process. Given these limitations, future research should include a broader range of participants from different early childhood centres.

Longitudinal studies of educators would illustrate the evolution of adaptation and professional development. If one asks centre leaders, co-workers, and family members what they personally believe, one could potentially be able to understand more clearly. Teachers from different backgrounds or school systems can encounter different problems, but they may also have some things in common. It might also be useful to learn more about how support systems like induction programs, mentoring, and culturally responsive leadership can help new migrant teachers. Finally, future research should examine the impact of educational programs on the employment of teachers trained abroad. By looking into these areas, future research can help migrant teachers more and make conversations about teacher migration and adaptation more in-depth.

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