

## Working Local, Going Global: Challenges and Opportunities of Working Students Teaching English as a Second Language

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**Abstract:** *The world has become globally focused, making English as the primary medium of communication. This study delves into the lived experiences of college students working as part-time online ESL teachers using the Phenomenological research design through interviews and focused group discussions involving ten (10) third year English major students. After extensive analysis, the following themes emerged: a) Exciting Part of the Job; b) Challenges Encountered in the Workplace c) Coping Mechanism for the Problem; d) Fruit of the Participants' Hard Work; and e) Meaning of the Experience to the Participants. The study shows that learners had challenges on cultural differences, schedule struggles, financial insufficiency, and language barrier. However, they also coped with the dilemma through managing time effectively, being open-minded to other cultures, speaking in an accent and level understandable to the learners, and being flexible to the learners' learning styles. The participants also met new people, learned new things, earned from their hard work and realized that their job prepared them for their future teaching career. The researcher recommends that the university may design class schedules that separate the day the day and night shifts, so students can meet both their studies and work.*

**Key Words:** *ESL learners, working students, challenges and opportunities.*

### Introduction

There is an immediate necessity for programs that teach English as a second language (ESL) because the world is growing more globally focused. At present, there are many countries that host learners of English as a second language (ESL) (Manko, 2010). In particular, the Philippines is among the top choices because of its low tuition, affordable cost of living, and its good number of educated ESL teachers. They insist that foreigners find the Filipino English comprehensible for it adheres to American English rules and conventions, despite the differences the two languages have in terms of phonology and grammar (Hohsung, 2016).

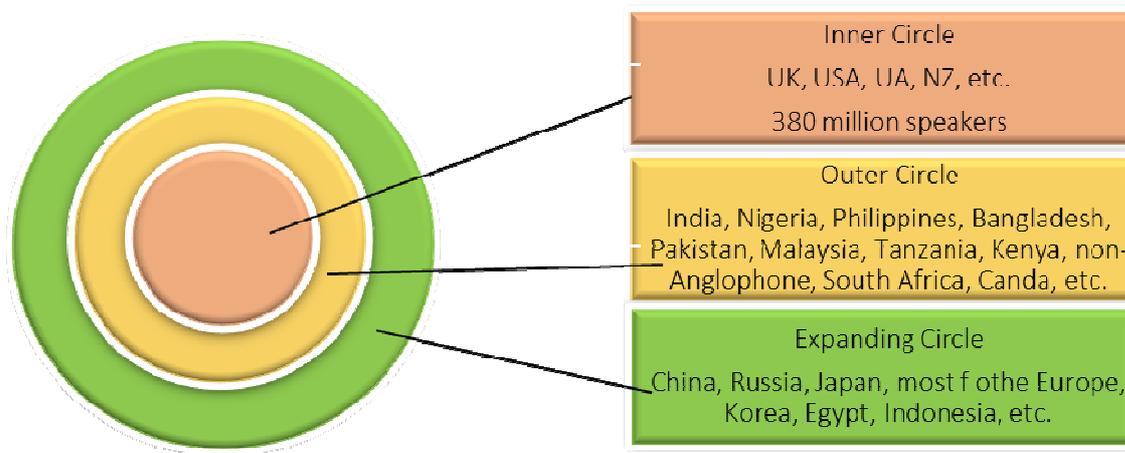
Furthermore, Tourism Secretary Wanda Corazon T. Teo said that English as Second Language (ESL) study in the Philippines has become one of the most sought-after programs worldwide, serving the Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese and Korean clients. The Philippines has also been considered as the world's third-largest English-speaking nation. It has become one of the choice destinations of international students for high quality and affordable education, as well as for fun vacations. Moreover, ESL teaching in the Philippines has become an alternative revenue earner to many ESL teachers, professionals and even to entrepreneurs. According to the list of the Department of Tourism (DOT) partner-schools, there are about 33 ESL schools and programs in the country, however, the numbers are believed to be higher if online-course programs are

included. The DOT also identified 15 leading institutions in Cebu, Baguio and Iloilo (Business Mirror, 2017). In 2004, the Department of Tourism (DOT), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the Bureau of Immigration (BI) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that established the following rules and regulations on the implementation of the Philippines English as a Second Language Tour Program (Pantig, 2004).

Several researches on ESL teaching have been flooding. Those studies included professional participants who have finished a degree and have acquired the needed skills to be a qualified and become an effective ESL teacher. However, there are only few researches that involved ESL teachers who were only undergraduate students and this study is one of them. Interestingly, the experiences of the participants are worth-sharing since they all thrived to work to help themselves continue their studies. Their desire to earn and support their studies are highlighted. ESL teaching was the best that they could resort to for preparation and mastery of their future career. Because of the facts above, the researcher intentionally conducted the study to investigate the challenges of the ESL teachers which they encountered as they teach in terms of their financial struggles, communication skills of their learners, cultural differences and their students learning styles including the coping strategies of the teachers to address the challenges. The opportunities in terms learning, monetary benefits and cultural awareness were also targeted in the study.

The study is anchored on the “Three Circles of English” model by Braj Kachru in 1988. The model showed that the speakers of English can be classified in three circles: inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle. It emphasized that there are foreign learners of English who benefited from the native and second language users of English in order to learn English (Englishwordpress.com (2017)). The Inner Circle is made up native English or the norm providing speakers from whom the language norms originated and spread to the other circles. These people are from USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Outer Circle represent the places where people are second language users, the norm developing or the non-native varieties speakers of English due to their colonial history. These people challenge the norms and developed them. Some of the countries that belong to this circle are Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Zambia. The Expanding Circle is made up of the norm dependent people or the English as Foreign Language speakers where English is not usually spoken. In this circle, the speakers have to follow rules established by the Inner Circle and developed by the Outer Circles. Some countries that belong to this circle are China, Japan, Korea, Egypt, Russia, Brazil, Taiwan, USSR., Saudi Arabia and etc. (Kuo, 2011).

The model below summed the theory in general.



## Review of Literature

Akasha (2014) insisted that teaching people with different cultural background enrich both the learners' and the teachers' cultural knowledge. Specifically, the participants of the study have a positive experience and they all reported that they had gained something important to them. Their cultural knowledge has expanded. However, in the part of the learners, some of them aren't comfortable learning with an opposite gender. If forced to do so, they remain quiet and choose to do the task after the schedules period which also happen during the interaction of the teachers and learners who are of opposite gender.

For Fu (2013), teachers find handling ESL students difficult especially when they had insufficient background knowledge on the students' language and culture. The diversity of the learners has been too necessary to explore that teachers oftentimes conceal their religious beliefs just to understand the learners. This is for the reason that if students do not attain adequate proficiency in the use of the English language in order to learn the content, the teachers would then be blamed to have not been doing their job. The ESL learners have diverse educational levels, so teachers had to make necessary modifications in teaching. It is important that teachers go the extra mile in showing sympathy to the learners struggles, so they would feel comfortable, safe and protected. Teachers' learning from the cultural orientation of the learners contributed to their growth as professionals. The experience allowed ESL teachers to meet around the world and personally learn from their culture.

According to Chestnut (2016), ESL teachers find teaching foreign students a prestigious job since English is used by successful and powerful leaders operating in many businesses. In the study of Moon (2010), he mentioned that ESL teachers indicates that majority of the participants of the study, who are teachers, agreed that ESL learners struggle more in learning in the area of English. Anderson (2008) Teaching ESL is a rigorous job for many instructors because teachers because in many cases, the students are not of the same level. These students are taught to read, write, speak and learn grammar on the context of education in one semester. It is even more

challenging because they all come from diverse backgrounds and their students have different language proficiency. In a separate study of Sartor (2010), he cited some challenging scenario in the ESL is the limited skills and limited access of the professors to the internet. Added to the struggle is the students' difficulty in presenting their leaning because of lack of vocabulary (Akasha, 2014).

## **Methodology**

### **1. Research Site and Respondents**

The researcher conducted the study in a state university in the Philippines. The respondents involved were the ten (10) third year English majors of the university during the second semester of S.Y 2017-2018.

### **2. Instruments and Procedure of Data Collection**

The researcher scheduled specific days with the ten participants. They were gathered together for the interview and focus group discussion. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed and are kept for confidentiality purposes. The questionnaire contains 10 questions.

### **3. Data Treatment**

The study employed the quantitative research design. It specifically employed the phenomenological research approach using the Colaizzi's method of data analysis which has seven analysis steps. The emerged themes were further explained by the researcher in the discussion section.

## **Results and Discussions**

After extensive analysis and interpretations, five (5) themes emerged. They were: a) Exciting part of the job; b) Challenges encountered in the workplace; c) Coping mechanism for the problem; d) Fruits of the hard work of the participants; and e) Meaning of the experience to the participants.

### **Theme 1: Exciting Part of the Job**

Teaching was never a piece of cake to the participants because they were dealing with a job where clients were foreigners. Teaching was never a piece of cake to the participants because they were dealing with a job where clients were foreigners. Added to it was the setting of the teaching process which was online. Despite all these, ESL teachers still found exciting parts of the experience which include meeting people from other countries, experiencing a multicultural teaching-learning process, being able to apply learnings in school and boosting confidence. They couldn't help, but share the experience to their friends because for them, the experience was an opportunity that not all students could get into. The job set them apart from other students who did not have the chance to personally get a grasp of the culture of other nationalities. In this

study, earning was the students' prime reason of working because despite their being scholars and the free tuition of the university, they all came from less fortunate families that if they didn't get into ESL teaching they could not possibly continue their studies. In general, earning helped them much.

According to Participants 1 and 6,

*"...this gave me the chance to meet new people. I also earned which helped me in my studies."*

For participants 2, 4, and 7 mentioned,

*"...working as ESL teacher gave me the chance to meet new people online every day, build relationships and improve my confidence."*

In addition, participants 3 and 5 added,

*"...teaching ESL online offers a good deal of diverse multicultural teaching-learning experiences that allow me to impart the knowledge that I have to my students. At the same time, gaining knowledge about different things through the various standpoints and perspective shared by the students. And of course, not to mention I also get to earn and build my confidence."*

All these meant that the participants were have benefited from experiencing something new that supported their studies. They could be called tagged as adventurous and risk takers for they did what they found interesting and challenging and helpful.

## **Theme 2: Challenges Encountered in the Workplace**

The participants in general resorted to this part time job for monetary reasons. Mainly, the opportunity aided them financially for their studies and for their allowance, specifically for school projects and other academic requirements. Though the amount they received did not meet all they needed, they still found the job too important that they would tend to their job no matter how hectic their schedules were. Besides, they also believed that they all have problems in communicating with their students, adjusting to their learning styles, handling cultural differences and managing their work schedules. In the aspect of language, the participants believed that they struggled explaining the lesson for their students have limited vocabulary.

Participants 1, 3 and 8 commented,

*"...they somehow have basic knowledge even to simple vocabulary. So, we gave emphasis to teaching them the basic grammar and vocabulary. This simple problem resulted to listening comprehension"*

Participants 4, 6, 7, and 10 supported,

*“...English is foreign to them, yet they are interested to learn the language. They also have struggles in their listening comprehension ability”*

Participant 5 expressed,

*“...when they respond or talk, they spoke using their own accent.*

The study of Khuo (2011) affirmed the result. In the aspect of language, both the teachers and the learners encountered difficulties in understanding one another due to the accent, intelligibility of the conversation. Both believed that the accents are too different from what they are used to and practiced back home (Belay, 2013). Other language barrier includes grammar structure, pronunciation and accent. This was evident on the way the students spoke since Japanese and Koreans have the accent different from ours. In addition, the participants were not exposed to listening to the way the Japanese sounded when speaking using English and this added to their dilemma. This resulted to problem in listening comprehension. This has rooted

Besides language problems, the issue on the different learning styles of the students arose. Participants encountered students who demanded on how the class should be run. Some of their students would request for a particular pace while others would want to focus on grammar alone. These were caused by their students' motives why they studied. Their students took the classes for different reasons. Some wanted to prepare themselves for employment. Some only aimed to pass the entrance exam of the universities they wished to study, be it in their country or abroad and for the purpose of passing the tests that permitted them entrance to English speaking countries and even to big companies for employment. During the learning process, it was evident that some of the teachers discovered that students learned better when gestures and pictures browsed from the internet were used in the along with other techniques during the delivery. However, the company also recommended strategies to effectively deal with the learners' varied learning styles.

Cultural diversity had also directly impacted the learning process. The participants could hardly build connection and establish rapport with the learners because majority of the Koreans and Japanese were reserved. They seldom gave out information about them and they resisted from sharing their personal experiences and information for possible initiation of the conversation.

Participants 1, 4, 5, and 9 commented,

*“...I experienced it. I was also told by our trainers to be cautious in talking to them especially asking about their personal information because Japanese and Korean people are really sensitive.”*

However, as regards our culture as Filipinos, they were open-minded and they loved listening to it.

Participants 1, 3, 6 and 7 added,

*“They found it interesting in talking about how we are as Filipinos, but they held back about sharing about their cultural background.”*

Participant 5 supported saying,

*“...and they would love to hear our culture. They are limited in sharing their experiences.”*

Therefore, it was safe to share our culture to them than asking them about theirs. Commonly, they responded that sharing about their cultural practices might lead to identity theft. Added to the struggles experienced, was the work schedule that the company gave to the teachers within 8:00pm to 12:00am based on their availability since they were students during day time. There were times that schedules were changed due to the availability of the Japanese and Korean students. As result, they sometimes missed their classes. Right after classes, they still have to travel home and tended to their assignments and other requirements.

Participants 1, 3, 5,6, and 10 said,

*“...work schedule is from 8:00pm to 12:00am. It is really tiring. With this work schedule, we find it hard to sleep, socialize and study. We sometimes do not have time to socialize with our friends.”*

Participants 2 and 8 expressed,

*“...working schedule is sometimes in conflict with my schedule, hence, I only have a minimum amount of time to do other things like studying, working on paper works and spending time with the family.”*

According to Participants 4 and 9

*“We only have a very short time left to attend to our other needs aside from school stuff.”*

Their work schedules greatly affected them for they have not rested enough to be ready for the next day. These showed how persistent these students were in order to earn for their additional allowance. Rarely, there were times that their job was affected by the slow internet connection, but the inconvenience took only seconds or minutes, and sometimes the problem was unnoticeable.

### **Theme 3: Coping Mechanism for the Problem**

The respondents believed that the situation was no longer as tough as what it was during the time they started. They insisted that some coping strategies could lessen the burden. To cope with language barrier, they listened more to videos with Japanese who spoke English and got themselves accustomed to how they speak. Commonly, they spoke in what they called as 'broken English'. They spoke in an accent and level understandable to the student, even to the point of neutralizing their accents and adjusting their speaking pace.

Participants 2, 3, 7, 9 and 10 said,

*"...I often speak very slowly, so as to help the students listen and understand my words....Sometimes, speaking in a phrase or words only greatly helps."*

Additionally, participants 6 and 8 commented,

*"... I adjust my pace and speak in a very simple English."*

The study of Belay supported that ESL teachers outside native English-speaking countries, tried to alter their accent and neutralize it. They also thought of themselves as better instructors for they have experienced the same hardships when they were students (Dorman (2010). As to the differences in the part of the respondents, they addressed the learners' varied learning styles by accessing google when they ran out of ideas about the lesson even during the lesson was conducted. They discovered the learning styles of the ESL learners and developed strategies to address the challenges and become more effective in handling ESL students (Abbas, 2012). They browsed pictures and use gestures to aid the comprehension difficulty of the learners. Most often, they employed the strategies that the company suggested and taught them during their training which was prior to their employment. As to the work schedules, they all tried managing their time and making themselves flexible to whatever changes they encountered both in school and in work.

Participants 2, 5 and 8 answered that,

*"...I cope with the challenges by properly managing my time. I manage my time wisely, so as to avoid complications."*

Participants 3, 9 and 10 agreed,

*“...At first it was difficult to manage time, but I was able to adjust by managing my time.”*

Participant 4 in consonance said,

*“I was able to cope these challenges by being flexible. An ESL teacher should be flexible when it comes to dealing with his or her students because we are unique individuals, and so are our students.”*

Participant 7 added,

*We should adjust, so that none between work and studies is sacrificed.”*

To aid the teachers' struggles on the challenges in the workplace, the study of Abbas stated that a match between teaching and learning styles helps to motivate students' process of learning. That is why teachers should identify their own teaching styles as well as their learning styles to obtain better results in the classroom. Discovering these learning styles will allow the students to determine their own personal strengths and weaknesses and learn from them. Teachers can incorporate learning styles into their classroom by identifying the learning styles of each of their students, matching teaching styles to learning styles for difficult tasks, strengthening weaker learning styles (Hsiang-Ling, 2011). Immediately after school, they proceeded to their workplace which was only one jeepney ride away from school. Their assignments were only done in school during their vacant periods and when needed, they accomplished them even at dawn after reaching home from work. As they worked, they also adjusted to the culture of the students they were dealing with by being open-minded and most importantly by respecting the behavior and ways of the learners that are culture-based to avoid possible argument and mistrust.

#### **Theme 4: Fruits of the Hard Work of the Participants**

ESL teaching in the case of the student teachers was a tough pill to swallow. However, there were also part of the experience that the participants found beneficial. The work itself was a valuable time to learn something new. As per the participants, they learned new things coming from the unfamiliar questions of the students, re-learned their previous grammar lesson which they have forgotten over time and refreshed recent learnings in English. They even learned to multitask combining typing words and talking to their students. The benefits extended to earning money since they were paid that ranged from forty-five to sixty-five pesos (P45 – P65) per hour as part time employee. They used the money as allowance in times shortage occurred and when sudden bulk of requirements arose.

Participants 4, 6 and 9 mentioned,

*“...The money I earn from teaching ESL helps me form my projects and for that need to be purchased. These involve money, so I am too fortunat. to have this job that’s challenging because of the multi-tasking that I do in the workplace.”*

Participants 2, 3 and 10 insisted,

*“I was able to save money for my urgent needs in school. However, it was never easy to get the amount since we needed to type while talking.”*

Participants 5 and 10 added,

*“... We should learn to shift from one work to another. The work needs multi-tasking.”*

From a diverse class, teachers also learned about the culture of others and share theirs. This function as an incentive that help them sustain their passion in performing their job (Dorman, 2010). With culture, the participants became aware their students’ culture. Specifically, they became watchful of their questions through avoiding sensitive and personal topics which included asking name, age, likes and dislikes. It led them to personally and deeply understand the word cultural diversity. For them, open-mindedness and respect were the two important things that have to observe at all times to avoid conflict and possible misunderstanding.

Participants 1, 2, 4 and 8 revealed that,

*“With the students, culture, I learned to be guarded of what I do and say. I’ve understood cultural diversity because of my work.*

Participants 3 and 6 added,

*“...I was able to know the different culture being practiced by my students in their country.”*

Participant 7 agreed,

*“It helped me become aware of the different cultures and style of different people from different countries.”*

### **Theme 5: Meaning of the experience to the Participants**

According to Langridge (2014), individuals who started experiencing meaning in work the earliest also scored the highest on the collegiate experience scale is notable. In the case of the

participants in this study, the experience was more than just a job but a memory to keep for a lifetime. They remarked.

Participants 1, 3, and 6 said,

*“This is so meaningful because it’s every day that we get the chance to talk to people from other countries. And this is not only a job, but an earning opportunity.”*

Participant 2 and 9 supported,

*“It’s a great honor for me to be able to teach other people while studying. It spiced up my life as a college student as well.”*

Participant 3 and 10 finally remarked,

*“Being a working student handling ESL classes is tough, yet a very fun and interesting job. It somewhat molds me into a better and mature person.”*

Participant 9 supported,

*“Life changing because it can develop our personality in dealing with other nationalities.”*

Moreover, the experience meant to them as tool of enhancing their teaching skills as education students. This signaled that it gave them lasting and life-long learnings. Therefore, it was too valuable for they look forward to applying it in the future. According to

Participant 4, 7 and 8 said,

*“...The experience is a preparation for a real-life teaching.*

Participant 5 and 6 said,

*“This means getting closer to my future career.”*

Participant 2 and 3 mentioned that,

*“This is for us an advance practicum to becoming a teacher.”*

## **Conclusion**

The ESL teaching job has many exciting moments and challenges. However, the challenges could be overcome by proper time management, open-mindedness, respect and by being innovative. As a result, the right coping mechanism could lead to opportunities that were lasting and even life-long. Part of the positive benefits were the personal meaning of the experience and the lifetime lessons about differences.

From the facts found, the researcher recommends that the university may design schedules that specify the day shift and the night shift, so students can meet both their class schedules and their work. This could greatly help those students who also worked while studying because there were students who stayed in school from morning until evening. The curriculum of the school may also include orientation on the culture of the ESL students' nationalities who come to the Philippines to study English to address the difficulty of any of any of the students who might end working in ESL schools after graduation.

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