



Living, Teaching, and Belonging: How Shared Experiences Shape the Identity of Filipino Teachers in Thailand

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Article Info

Received: May 5, 2025

Accepted: September 18, 2025

Published: October 22, 2025



10.46303/jcve.2025.25

How to cite

Perales, W. F., Ulla, M. B., Ponsaran, J. N., Bacala, M. F. B., Rodriguez, J. J. C. (2025). Living, Teaching, and Belonging: How Shared Experiences Shape the Identity of Filipino Teachers in Thailand. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 8(3), 20-38.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2025.25>

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study aims to examine the shared experiences of five Filipino teachers in Thailand, focusing on how they shape group identity and promote social cohesion. Guided by the Community of Practice (CoP) framework, the study employed ethnographic observation and semi-structured individual interviews to examine how cultural adaptation, communal support, and shared practices affect both the professional and personal lives of migrant teachers. Findings revealed that Filipino teachers faced substantial adjustments in adapting to Thailand's teaching environment, especially in terms of pedagogy, cultural norms, and institutional structures. However, the participants also revealed that shared identity and support from fellow Filipinos served as critical mechanisms for resilience and adaptation, with cultural gatherings and traditions strengthening social bonds and alleviating homesickness. This study highlights the dynamic nature of CoPs, emphasizing how shared experiences and communal support networks evolve to address the challenges of transnational teaching contexts. These findings have important implications for educational institutions, community organizations, and policymakers in creating culturally responsive environments to support migrant teachers. This research not only explores the relationship between shared experiences, group identity, and social cohesion but also contributes to an understanding of the lived experiences of migrant teachers, providing actionable insights into building inclusive and supportive communities in multicultural environments.

KEYWORDS

Community of practice; cultural adaptation; Filipino teachers; group identity; social cohesion.

INTRODUCTION

Social categories, including organizations and groups, are considered crucial in shaping individuals' behavior and society's broader conditions. Studies in the literature (Hogg, 2023; Lakhmani et al., 2022; Levine, 2018; Manata & Bozeman, 2022; Thornton et al., 2019) have highlighted that such social groups, such as professional associations, families, ethnic communities, and cultural or religious affiliations bring people together, support identity formation, and affect how people engage with their environment. Levine (2018), for instance, emphasizes that collaborative problem-solving within groups thrives due to the shared and diverse knowledge of its members, which promotes creative thinking and collective decision-making. This is because the collaborative nature of groups enables the pooling of resources, information, and skills, which can enhance creativity and problem-solving abilities among members (Levine, 2018; Manata & Bozeman, 2022; Sithole & Dube, 2025).

More importantly, social groups are not only spaces of collaboration but also sites of identity construction. Charness and Chen (2020) show that individuals derive a strong sense of self from their affiliation with groups, as these affiliations affect language, behavior, cultural awareness, and self-perception. Belonging to a community, therefore, is not merely a social experience but a defining aspect of personal identity. Therefore, while providing comfort or a sense of belonging, groups also shape one's self-definition and personal achievement.

The experiences of Filipino teachers living and working abroad, particularly in Thailand, remain underexplored despite their growing presence in the region's education systems (Ulla, 2021). Living in a foreign country, teaching in culturally diverse classrooms, and negotiating one's sense of belonging in unfamiliar environments are daily realities that shape the identity of Filipino teachers abroad (Ulla, 2018). These experiences influence how they interact with others, how they perceive themselves within their institutions, and how they make sense of their roles as professionals and community members (Lemana et al., 2024; Ulla, 2024). However, current literature seldom captures the lived experiences of these transnational educators or considers how their shared cultural heritage and collective adaptation strategies contribute to group identity and social cohesion in the workplace.

While existing studies have examined the general role of social groups in shaping individuals' behaviors, identities, and collaborative efforts (Hogg, 2023; Lakhmani et al., 2022; Levine, 2018; Manata & Bozeman, 2022; Thornton et al., 2019), there remains a lack of research that focuses specifically on Filipino teachers in transnational contexts such as Thailand. Empirical studies on this population are sparse, and most research has either treated migrant teachers as isolated individuals or focused on institutional or policy-level concerns without exploring into their lived experiences. Theoretical gaps also persist in how social identity theory or group cohesion frameworks are applied to Southeast Asian migrant educators, particularly from the Philippines. Moreover, there is a population gap, as the voices of Filipino teachers in Thailand, a country with a substantial number of overseas Filipino teachers, are largely absent in current scholarly discourse.

These gaps are crucial because unresolved issues around identity and belonging may negatively affect the well-being, professional growth, and sustainability of Filipino teachers' careers abroad. If the collective identity and shared struggles of this population remain unacknowledged, efforts to support them institutionally may be superficial at best. Thus, studies that highlight their lived experiences and examine how they navigate group belonging, social cohesion, and professional identity can help address these critical gaps.

This study addresses that challenge by examining the collective experiences of a group of Filipino English language teachers at a university in Thailand. It examines how living and working abroad, along with engaging in shared cultural and professional practices, promote a sense of social cohesion and develop a distinct group identity. Drawing on the idea that social groups, such as cultural or professional communities, help shape individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and identities (Charness & Chen, 2020; Hogg & Rinella, 2018; Laar et al., 2010), this research highlights how collective experience becomes the foundation for belonging and solidarity. While previous research has emphasized the structural and functional aspects of group cohesion (Breidahl et al., 2018; Fonseca et al., 2018; Manata & Bozeman, 2022; Thornton et al., 2019), this study focuses on cohesion as emerging from shared lived realities. It argues that such cohesion, born out of common challenges and aspirations, not only defines group identity but also promotes resilience and professional sustainability among Filipino educators in Thailand.

Addressing these empirical and theoretical gaps, this ethnographic inquiry contributes to a deeper understanding of how transnational teachers form bonds, build collective identity, and establish supportive communities within their host countries. In doing so, it aims to offer insights that may inform institutional support, policy frameworks, and inclusive practices in cross-cultural educational contexts. Guided by relevant studies, this study specifically answered the following research questions:

- What experiences do Filipinos share as a group of teachers in Thailand?
- What role do Filipino teachers' shared experiences play in developing their group identity?
- How do Filipino teachers' shared experiences contribute to forming social cohesion as groups?

Group identity

Charness and Chen (2020) defined group identity as an individual's sense of self, stemming from their perceived affiliation with social groups. They claim that such an identity profoundly affects how people behave in various situations, particularly when working together. In other words, strong group identity increases the likelihood that members will act in ways that advance the group's interests and strengthen social cohesiveness. Individuals who strongly identify with their organization are more likely to collaborate with other members, resulting in increased motivation, loyalty, and performance (Blader et al., 2017). For example, Breidahl et al. (2018) examined the relationship between shared community values and social cohesion, with a focus

on trust and solidarity among individuals. They revealed that individuals who align with and perceive these values as widely shared tend to exhibit higher levels of trust and solidarity, underscoring the importance of shared values in promoting social cohesion. Although the study was conducted in Denmark, it addresses a gap in the existing literature by examining how collective values impact social cohesion in this distinct context.

As social identities shape how people view themselves and other members of their social groups, they are essential for group identification. Hogg and Rinella (2018) noted that individuals cognitively construct their social identities as prototypes or collections of characteristics that define the group. In other words, when people identify with a social group, they often align their attitudes, emotions, and perceptions with those of other group members, resulting in a shared reality. Thus, a cohesive group identity results from this shared reality, which validates individual experiences and strengthens the sense of belonging (Hogg & Rinella, 2018).

Additionally, belonging to a community may help one feel less insecure about oneself, especially during difficult and precarious times (Guerra et al., 2020). In other words, people can find stability and clarity of identity by joining groups that provide mutually understood and unambiguous templates. For instance, in a study by Filstad et al. (2019), researchers examined how people at work interpret and experience the concept of belonging in the workplace and understand their perceptions of their sense of belonging and membership. Fifty-one participants from Norway and Italy were recruited for the study using an inductive qualitative methodology. This study used a technique known as “snaplogs,” in which participants snapped pictures that reflected their sense of identity and wrote captions to explain their decisions. The findings revealed that social contact, group activities, and the physical surroundings of the workplace all contribute to a person’s sense of belonging.

Social Cohesion: Promoting a sense of belonging

Social cohesion, a multidimensional concept often linked to societal harmony and functionality, plays a crucial role in building and sustaining communities, as highlighted in various academic studies (Chong, 2023; Fonseca et al., 2018; Lakhmani et al., 2022; Millar & Vione, 2024; Wang et al., 2022). Although existing studies have diverse conceptualizations of social cohesion, it is an essential and constant element of community existence (see Anderson, 2022; Chong & Tsubota, 2023; Fonseca et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022). Fonseca et al. (2018) defined social cohesion as an ongoing process that promotes well-being, fosters a sense of belonging, and promotes voluntary participation among members of society. This process involves building communities that not only tolerate but also promote diverse values and cultures, while ensuring equal rights and opportunities for everyone (Fonseca et al., 2018). Simply put, social cohesion is not a static state but a continuous effort to strengthen community ties. This highlights the importance of promoting a sense of belonging, encouraging active and voluntary engagement, and embracing multiculturalism and tolerance.

While this definition seems sufficient to describe the factors surrounding social cohesion, other studies (Dey & MP, 2020; Szeto, 2022; Thornton et al., 2019; Valli et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022) may offer different perspectives and frameworks based on how social cohesion is studied in their contexts. For example, Valli et al. (2019) examined the impact of economic transfers on social cohesion between Colombian refugees and low-income Ecuadorians residing in urban and peri-urban areas of Ecuador. The primary goal was to determine whether cash, food, and food vouchers could enhance social cohesion within these ethnic communities, with a specific focus on interactions between refugees and the host population. Employing a cluster-randomized control trial design involving 145 randomized clusters, the findings revealed that economic transfers considerably improved social cohesion among Colombian beneficiaries, particularly in areas such as agency, confidence in institutions, attitudes toward diversity, and social participation. However, the study also showed that while economic transfers have the potential to improve social cohesion, their effects can differ considerably among various groups within the host community.

Dey and MP (2020) examined the factors affecting team cohesion in India, focusing on task and social cohesion within software development teams. It specifically examines how team boundedness, formal coordination, and organizational tenure diversity influence these two dimensions. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), data were collected through a survey that employed a seven-point Likert-type scale to measure task and social cohesion among the 398 team members and leaders who participated. The findings highlight that team design and technical factors have a substantial impact on cohesion within software development teams. It emphasizes the role of formal coordination in enhancing task cohesion and notes that organizational tenure diversity could challenge social cohesion. The authors suggest that further research should explore these dynamics across various team contexts and consider other dimensions of cohesion, providing valuable insights for enhancing team performance in software development environments.

Various scholars have also examined social cohesion in the context of education, integrating it into career education to ensure that all students have equitable opportunities for personal and professional development (Szeto, 2022), as well as its importance in improving student engagement and retention (Thornton et al., 2019). For example, Thornton et al. (2019) studied the impact of group cohesion on key success measures, including student retention, achievement, and attendance, in higher education institutions. The study involved 107 first-year students from higher education institutions in England, and data were collected through questionnaires during scheduled lessons. Pearson's correlations were used to examine the relationships between various aspects of cohesion, such as morale and belonging, and success measures. The findings show that student attendance was significantly higher in the first semester than in the second semester. Moreover, overall group cohesion positively correlated with attendance, accounting for 6.7% of the variance. Specifically, both belonging and morale were positively linked to attendance in both semesters, and these correlations were more

pronounced in the second semester. However, cohesion levels did not change significantly from the first semester to the second semester. The study concluded that group cohesion, particularly the elements of belonging and morale, plays a significant role in influencing student attendance and other key success metrics in higher education.

Wang et al. (2022) examined the cohesion of classroom communities in higher education with a particular focus on the roles of social presence and social capital within a private university in Asia. They aim to identify key factors contributing to classroom community cohesion, addressing a gap in the existing literature regarding effective strategies for promoting such environments. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed by teachers to their respective classroom communities, with 136 students. The study's findings highlight that social presence is the most significant factor influencing classroom community cohesion, despite participants not perceiving a strong sense of social presence among themselves. Social presence was found to directly affect social cohesion and indirectly affect it through structural and relational capital. Despite this, there was a notable lack of active interaction among students, as many treated the community primarily as an information center rather than as a space for engagement. Thus, the researchers emphasized the role of social presence in promoting classroom community cohesion.

These studies (Dey & MP, 2020; Szeto, 2022; Valli et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022) demonstrate that social cohesion is a crucial component of community life, significantly impacting various societal aspects, including refugee integration, team dynamics, and education. Due to its role in promoting solidarity, well-being, and inclusiveness, further research on social cohesion is essential, especially for developing effective strategies to build cohesive and supportive communities in diverse settings.

Theoretical Framework: Community of Practice

As a framework of analysis, the CoP serves as a guiding principle in professional work and, as a social platform, it constitutes a “group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). As a complementary entity to existing formal structures, the CoP is notable for its adaptability and negotiability in terms of focus, format, and level of participation.

This qualitative study on group identity and social cohesion among Filipino English language teachers in Thailand employs a community of practice framework, focusing on purpose, people, and practice as its key dimensions. From this perspective, these three interconnected elements are mutually inclusive and constantly evolving. Consequently, any change in one aspect leads to corresponding shifts in others, indicating that goals may adapt, members may come and go, platforms may change, and shared practices may evolve (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

The CoP promotes a culture of co-ownership, co-development, and co-accountability among participating members, strengthening group identity and social cohesion. As a social tool, the CoP enables the subculture in question (i.e., the culture within a culture) to establish

its professional practice, construct its collective identity, and respond to internal and external organizational changes. Therefore, the community of practice is essentially purpose-driven, people-centered, and practice-oriented, with an overarching objective of improving the *craft* under consideration (e.g., language teaching in a transnational setting). In the specific context of the subject of inquiry, the purpose, people, and practice dimensions, as a whole, are predicated on the participants' social status as *Filipino migrants* (e.g., socio-cultural) and employment as *educators* (e.g., socio-professional).

METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic phenomenology

This study employed an ethnographic-phenomenological approach to examine how Filipino teachers in Thailand build social cohesion and negotiate a shared sense of group identity. The study focused on cultural practices, values, and social interactions that shape how this migrant community makes sense of their experiences abroad. Drawing from ethnography, the research examined how participants reflect on and reproduce their shared knowledge and cultural understandings in everyday interactions (Ellis et al., 2011; Garfinkel, 1967). Simultaneously, it incorporated phenomenological perspectives (Groenewald, 2004) by centering on how Filipino teachers experience, interpret, and express the meanings of belonging and identity formation in a foreign context. Group identity, in this study, refers to the participants' collective sense of being Filipino educators abroad, shaped by common experiences, language practices, cultural expressions, and emotional connections.

Context and participants

This study was conducted in a southern Thai province with a sizable Filipino teaching community. Approximately 300 Filipino teachers are employed in the area, working across public and private schools and universities. Their community life is rich with social and cultural practices that reinforce a sense of shared identity. Regular gatherings, such as *Philippine Independence Day celebrations*, *Christmas parties*, and local *sportsfests*, serve as cultural rituals that reaffirm collective values and traditions. These events are more than social; they are cultural rituals that sustain connections to the homeland and foster solidarity. Participants also maintain an active Facebook group, which functions as a virtual community space for sharing news, offering support, and organizing events. Through both physical and digital interactions, these teachers navigate their dual roles as professionals and cultural bearers, creating a space where identity is continuously shaped and affirmed.

Adopting an emic perspective, the first and second authors, who are also university teachers, are active members of the Filipino community in this province. They attend many Filipino gatherings, which enable them to engage directly with local participants.

The data were collected in November and December, during which the researchers observed important Filipino events, including *the Sportsfest*, *the Christmas party*, and *birthday celebrations*. Thus, five Filipino teachers, aged between 29 and 40, volunteered to participate in

face-to-face interviews. Four were male and one was female. All five were teaching at the same university as the researchers and had been employed there for periods ranging from two to seven years. In addition to their professional roles, they were active members of the Filipino community in the province.

In addition, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research often involves a small number of participants to facilitate in-depth engagement and detailed analysis. They emphasize that phenomenological studies typically involve 5 to 25 participants, while case studies and ethnographies can work with even fewer, depending on the depth of interaction with participants and the intensity of data collection.

Research Instruments

The data for this study were collected using two primary qualitative methods: **ethnographic observation** and **semi-structured individual interviews**. Ethnographic observations were conducted during Filipino community events in Thailand, including *the Sportsfest, Christmas party, and birthday celebrations*. The purpose of these observations was to understand how Filipino teachers engage in community life and establish interpersonal relationships with their fellow Filipinos. The researchers assumed the role of non-participant observers and documented behaviors, language use, and interactions that reflected patterns of social bonding, cultural expression, and collective identity formation. Field notes were taken to record verbal exchanges, non-verbal cues, and spatial arrangements, all of which contributed to a thick description of how community cohesion is enacted in practice.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected Filipino teachers in Thailand. The purpose of the interviews was to gather in-depth narratives of personal and collective experiences related to teaching abroad, community involvement, and identity formation. The interview protocol was designed to elicit reflective responses on how participants perceive their sense of belonging, how shared experiences contribute to a collective Filipino identity, and the role of cultural practices in maintaining group cohesion. Sample interview questions included:

- How would you describe your sense of belonging with other Filipino teachers in Thailand?
- How do you think your shared experiences have shaped your identity as a group?
- Do you feel that being part of a Filipino teacher community in Thailand makes you more connected to your cultural roots? Why or why not?
- What activities or traditions bring Filipino teachers together as a group in Thailand?
- How do these shared experiences and activities contribute to a sense of unity among Filipino teachers?

Data Gathering Procedure

Before conducting the study, approval for human research ethics was obtained from the institutional review board. Once approved, with approval number WUEC-24-368-01, the

researchers verbally asked permission from the Filipino community president of the province to conduct the study. Some Filipinos were approached personally and invited to participate in the study. Although 11 Filipinos signified interest in the interview, only five were confirmed.

The interviews, which were conducted in either English or Filipino, lasted 30 to 60 minutes and were audio-recorded. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and it was made clear to them that their participation was voluntary. They were also assured that all the information they shared would be treated with utmost confidentiality. Their names were withheld to ensure anonymity. Additionally, all participants received detailed information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring their voluntary participation and understanding of their rights, including the right to withdraw at any point without any repercussions.

Data Analysis

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data prior to analysis, the researchers employed several strategies aligned with the standards of qualitative research. Credibility was reinforced through member checking, where the transcribed interviews were returned to participants for review and verification, as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2015). Participants were given five days to confirm the accuracy of their responses, revise any portions they felt uncomfortable sharing, and ensure the overall authenticity of the data.

Triangulation further supported the credibility and dependability of the findings. In addition to using interview transcripts and observation field notes, the researchers also had the transcripts checked by participants. Furthermore, they convened online to discuss the findings and agree on the themes developed for analysis, cross-checking emerging patterns and insights. This method helped reduce potential bias and provided a more thorough understanding of the participants' experiences.

The study applied a thematic analysis approach to identify recurring patterns across the dataset. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data, generated initial codes, searched for and reviewed themes, defined and named these themes, and produced the final report. To aid this process, the data were organized and coded using Microsoft Excel. The coding system was inductively developed and refined through collaborative discussions among the researchers to enhance consistency and analytical depth. Themes were derived in direct alignment with the research questions and are presented in the Findings section, accompanied by illustrative excerpts from the interview transcripts.

FINDINGS

The interview excerpts presented below are verbatim from the participants. Thus, they may have contained language errors. These excerpts were attributed to the individual interview participants, who were assigned codes, such as Participant 1 (P1) and Participant 2 (P2).

What experiences do Filipinos share as a group of teachers in Thailand?

Adjustment to a different teaching environment

The interview participants shared that they encountered important adjustments in their professional identity. These changes were largely shaped by cultural and systemic differences that influenced their teaching practices. P1 said:

During my first year of teaching in Thailand, there was significant adjustment. Although I was a seasoned teacher in the Philippines when it came to pedagogy and class management, I realized that I could not apply here. Thailand has a different setting and culture, so it is not ideal to develop my previous skills. It is a mismatch. I need to adjust myself emotionally, psychologically, and perhaps holistically. I must adapt to the present conditions of the country where I work. I adjusted and adapted it to the culture. Thai students have different attitudes toward learning English.

Participant 2 echoed what Participant 1 highlighted. They shared similar experiences with adjusting to a different teaching environment and organizational dynamics.

First, when I arrived in 2006, the adjustment was tough. I taught in school for three years, after which I did not get renewed (my contract). Even after I created it, one student contestant won a contest in Bangkok. There were local politics in the school. It is important to be a team player and to always wear a beautiful smile; it is not about your teaching skills. You have to blend with the local culture because they are our bosses. (P2)

Challenges in building relationships due to language barriers

Participants also acknowledged that part of their experience teaching in Thailand involved facing challenges and adapting to a new teaching environment, primarily due to sociolinguistic barriers. While participants can engage in social occasions, meetings, and other professional interactions, they often struggle to form a deeper sense of community or confide in their emotions, such as happiness or frustration, due to cultural and linguistic differences. P3 acknowledged the following.

I would also say that it is a challenge to deal with my Thai colleagues. First, the language, I cannot build a community with them, I cannot have a group with them, although I can associate myself; I can go with them on some occasions and other meetings and other things, but to confide my feelings, happiness, and frustrations, I cannot do that with them because they could not understand me because they are not Filipinos. Thus, my teaching experience in Thailand is a mixture of feelings from different groups of people.

Such an experience was also shared by P4, who stated that she, too, had a problem with the language barrier. However, she learned to overcome such challenges and turned them into an enriching experience.

I experienced cultural adjustments not only with the students but also with the curriculum and educational system. Initially, I expected it to be similar to what I used in the Philippines. However, I quickly realized that Thailand, as an EFL country, operates

differently. I was shocked by my students' English proficiency levels and the curriculum structure itself. First, I found it challenging to navigate these differences, especially when interacting with teachers and adapting to the system. While the initial culture shock was significant, I have now adapted to the differences, including language barriers, time management, and school requirements. The transition went from feeling overwhelming to becoming an enriching experience of growth and understanding.

What role do Filipino teachers' shared experiences play in developing their group identity?

Support from fellow Filipino teachers

The shared experiences of Filipino teachers in Thailand play a pivotal role in shaping and reinforcing their group identity. These experiences serve as emotional, cultural, and professional anchors that foster solidarity and a deep sense of belonging among them. For example, participants recognized that while they faced difficulties adjusting to the new teaching environment and language barrier, being part of a community with their fellow Filipinos helped them easily navigate such challenges. P1 emphasized the significant role of the Filipino community in their adjustment to teaching in Thailand.

I can say that the availability of Filipino support has had a great impact on my adjustment to teaching. Without the Filipino community in the school, maybe I could have gone back to the Philippines, without the Filipinos surrounding me, positive people. I mean, you know the culture that not everyone is willing to support you, but I find the Filipino community in school to be very positive and very supportive. I would say that my adjustment was fast because I am a person who does not really adjust well because of my ego. (P1)

Similarly, P2 recognized how the Filipino community provided a home for him, which facilitated his quick adjustment to teaching in the country. He acknowledged that adjusting to a new environment is typically difficult; however, the encouragement and solidarity of his fellow Filipinos made his transition smoother and faster than expected.

We are far from home for our families in the Philippines. The Filipino community provides a home away from home by inviting you to simple dinners, birthday celebrations, and going to church. You feel that home is closer to you because you are surrounded by Filipinos; the culture is there. Many factors can make adjustments quickly. They can share their experiences and add to their easy adjustment to their work in Thailand. There was a time in which I organized the activities. You can see your participation in the community. You will not feel homesick because you are dealing with people from the same culture and language. (P5)

The community for belonging and cultural connection

Participants also revealed that they often seek fellow Filipinos to feel a sense of home and familiarity. They believed that being part of a Filipino community allows them to relate to one

another through shared language, traditions, and cultural practices, strengthening their bonds, preserving their cultural identity, and promoting unity within the community. According to P2:

It is not normal for Filipinos to not gather. We look for the Filipino community because, as I mentioned earlier, it is the only community to which we can relate and express ourselves. Therefore, whenever we gather, we do many things, we gossip, and we share problems, especially because we are all teachers. We share the same problems in teaching, our experiences with our students, and our classroom experiences. Therefore, we shared all of these things. This is a very good thing, because sharing experiences makes us solid. For example, because we share the same experiences, we sympathize with each other. We understand each other because we have had the same experience. Now, we share the same problems and solutions.

Additionally, participants noted that being surrounded by people who share the same culture and language creates a comfortable and reassuring environment. They also maintained that familiar activities and shared traditions helped alleviate the emotional strain of being away from home, forming a sense of belonging and cultural connection. P3 said:

You will not feel homesick because you are dealing with people from the same culture and language. There are activities that are close to the heart, such as Filipinos. Anxiety was reduced away from home. In terms of career, they can give advice on what they are going to do since they have already experienced it while you are still starting. Sharing experiences is part of community events. There are gatherings, dinners, and celebrities. The church also plays a significant role in building the community. If you do not know anyone in a place just go to church one Sunday, you will meet Filipinos and would even multiply as you continue going to church. (P3)

The findings also highlight that the shared experiences of Filipino teachers contribute to the formation of social cohesion within the group. This is evident through their cultural celebrations and gatherings. They also build trust and rapport with one another, which strengthens their relationships. Moreover, they develop a sense of family within their community.

How do Filipino teachers' shared experiences contribute to forming social cohesion as groups?

Building a family and a community through gatherings

Filipino teachers' shared experiences contribute significantly to forming social cohesion as a group, particularly through practices that promote belonging, trust, and cultural solidarity. These experiences are not just social activities but play a foundational role in shaping a collective identity and a supportive network vital for their well-being and success in a foreign environment.

For example, the participants stressed that as the community engages in various cultural celebrations, such as Christmas parties, birthday celebrations, and other important gatherings, they also joined and participated in these events, believing that such gatherings promote a sense of belonging and unity, as they provide opportunities for members to share their

experiences, food, and traditions, reinforcing their cultural identity and creating bonds among them. As Participant 4 said:

Joining cultural celebrations with fellow Filipinos within the community is pivotal. Very essential. I mean, kind of yeah, essential for someone to succeed. We are working abroad because we have a goal aside from earning money. We are an economic being—me and myself—I have to admit, I am an economic being. Therefore, we do not just succeed financially, but we have to succeed as a human person by having a sense of belonging in a community that can understand us.

This sense of success extends beyond individual accomplishments. It also highlights the formation of meaningful connections and friendships. P4 added:

What I mean is a human person who, you know, you can have many friends. You can, you know, create friendships here, even outside the Philippines. You know that there is mixture. From there, I succeeded in creating a community, a mixture of people from different places in the Philippines and different upbringings, but we united together here in Thailand.

In addition, the participants described their community as a family. Shared experiences create a familial atmosphere that provides comfort and a sense of security, which are essential for their well-being and professional success in a new environment. As stated by P5:

Here, the Filipino community provides us with a family. This provides us with a community. With all of the shared experiences that we have, this gives us a sense of belonging. If a word or phrase is used to describe it, it is family. Yeah, that's the role of shared experiences, and that's the role of our community here. It's family because we share our experiences, and it gives us strength as a community.

Building trust and rapport

Furthermore, through shared experiences, participants stressed the importance of establishing trust and confidence within the group. They believed that such shared experiences and open communication helped break down barriers and create a supportive environment in which they felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings, strengthening their relationships. P3 said:

For me, personally, I would say yes, it helps a lot. Why? If we gather, we can talk to each other, and then from there, we can build rapport; we can establish trust and confidence, so there are no more reservations. You feel okay that you are open to each other. This is what makes the culture good. Just like gathering, aside from enjoyment, you can strengthen your relationship with every Filipino. This is an advantage of celebrating events. Yes, it has had a big impact on me personally; this culture is being practiced. You are building a family away from home.

Being part of the community allows participants to maintain and strengthen their Filipino identity, which is crucial for their emotional well-being. For participants, it offers a space where they can connect with others who share their cultural background and social apprehensions, which in turn helps them feel grounded, valued, and supported. As everyone shares the same

nationality and cultural orientation, there is an inherent sense of trust that boosts confidence and strengthens relationships among Filipino teachers in Thailand. P2 said:

For me, the Filipino community is essential, so we can establish our identities, so we can survive in the local community, so we can survive in our chosen career here as teachers in Thailand. This community builds a strong connection to us and binds us all, and since we are all Filipinos, we always build confidence and trust among our fellow Filipinos here.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how shared experiences among Filipino teachers in Thailand promote social cohesion and shape group identity within a CoP. The main findings underscore the pivotal roles of cultural adaptation, mutual support, and shared cultural practices in creating a sense of community and belonging. Using the CoP framework as a lens, this research illustrates how Filipino teachers collectively navigate their professional and personal lives in a foreign context. As Wenger and Snyder (2000) posited, CoPs are purpose-driven, people-centered, and practice-oriented entities in which shared expertise and experiences promote social bonds. Thus, these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how migrant professionals build and sustain communities grounded in shared identity and cultural continuity.

A central finding is the adjustment to a new teaching environment, which emerged as both a personal and collective challenge. Participants reported initial difficulties adapting to Thai educational norms and institutional expectations, yet they were able to manage these challenges more effectively through the support of fellow Filipino teachers. This underscores the CoP's capacity for adaptive resilience, where community members draw strength from shared experiences. Lakhmani et al. (2022) emphasize that successful team dynamics hinge on adaptability, particularly in unfamiliar contexts. This is particularly evident in the experiences of P1 and P2, who initially found it challenging to adjust to their new teaching environment but were able to navigate these challenges more easily due to the support of the Filipino community. This finding extends Thornton et al.'s (2019) research on the role of group cohesion in enhancing engagement and retention, as Filipino teachers drew on their collective experiences to adapt to unfamiliar educational settings.

Another significant finding relates to language barriers and the role of communication in sustaining social cohesion. While the inability to fluently communicate in Thai initially posed difficulties, participants relied on their shared language, English, and Filipino, to maintain emotional and professional support networks. This aligns with Fonseca et al.'s (2018) assertion that communication is crucial to a sense of belonging in migrant communities. However, this study goes further by showing how a shared cultural background and national identity serve as unifying forces, even when linguistic alignment with the host country is limited. Hogg and Rinella's (2018) theory of social identity supports this interpretation, asserting that individuals conform to group norms and behaviors when they perceive themselves as prototypical

members of a group. Filipino teachers in this study exhibited this by aligning with one another's values and perspectives, reinforcing group cohesion and solidarity.

The role of cultural practices in nurturing emotional well-being and group identity was also central to this study. Participants highlighted how gatherings, food-sharing, and religious observances helped them maintain connections to their cultural roots and fostered trust within the community. This finding aligns with Filstad et al.'s (2019) work, which demonstrates how belonging can be cultivated through culturally meaningful practices. What sets the present study apart is its emphasis on how these practices transform individual emotional struggles, such as homesickness or isolation, into shared experiences that cultivate resilience and strengthen community ties. As Wenger and Snyder (2000) argue, CoPs evolve to meet the needs and aspirations of their members. Filipino teachers created spaces of familiarity and emotional safety, illustrating how such communities develop organically in response to members' lived realities.

While this study aligns with several previous studies (e.g., Fonseca et al., 2018; Hogg & Rinella, 2018; Filstad et al., 2019; Lakhmani et al., 2022), it also diverges by centering on the experiences of Filipino migrant teachers in Thailand as an educational CoP, highlighting how shared nationality and cultural background serve as cohesive forces. Unlike studies such as Valli et al. (2019), which focus on structural and economic interventions to promote social cohesion, this research emphasizes intrinsic factors, language, shared history, and collective memory as key elements in building rapport and trust. Similarly, it extends Wang et al.'s (2022) exploration of classroom community cohesion by showing how such cohesion is not confined to the classroom but extends into the broader migrant-teacher community.

Finally, this study contributes to the broader literature on social cohesion and group identity in transnational contexts, specifically Filipino teachers in Thailand. Examining the experiences of Filipino teachers in Thailand through the CoP framework provides an important perspective on understanding how migrant professionals utilize shared cultural resources to develop supportive communities both emotionally and professionally. The findings suggest that educational institutions and policymakers should recognize and support these informal networks, which are crucial for the adaptation and retention of foreign teachers. Initiatives such as culturally responsive onboarding programs, peer mentoring among migrant teachers, and institutional support for community-led activities could strengthen both teacher well-being and professional integration. Thus, the study confirms that cultural affinity and shared experiences are vital in creating meaningful professional communities within increasingly multicultural educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the shared experiences of Filipino teachers in Thailand and how these experiences contribute to their group identity and foster social cohesion, guided by the CoP framework. The findings showed that Filipino teachers face challenges in adapting to Thailand's

educational environment. These include navigating differences in teaching methods, adapting to cultural expectations, and overcoming systemic barriers such as language barriers and workplace hierarchies. These challenges impact not only their daily professional lives but also their adaptation strategies.

The study also revealed that Filipino teachers rely on a shared cultural identity and community support to understand and respond to these challenges. The presence of a strong Filipino community in Thailand helped participants navigate unfamiliar settings, strengthening their emotional resilience, professional growth, and cultural continuity. This sense of community became a vital space for sharing experiences, offering guidance, and maintaining morale.

Furthermore, the study highlighted how shared activities, such as cultural gatherings, collaborative teaching, and informal peer mentoring, help build group identity and enhance social cohesion. These collective efforts not only reduce feelings of isolation but also foster a sense of belonging, helping participants create “home away from home.” Thus, the study confirms that the professional and social experiences of Filipino teachers in transnational settings are affected not only by the challenges of working abroad but also by the strong role of community in strengthening collective identity and cohesion.

Despite its valuable contributions, this study had several limitations. First, it focuses exclusively on Filipino teachers in a specific geographic and professional context. Second, while rich and nuanced, reliance on phenomenology may benefit from triangulation with other methods and research designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. Third, the study primarily examined the positive aspects of shared experiences, with less attention paid to potential intragroup conflicts or the challenges of over-reliance on ethnic communities.

Future research could expand on this study by examining diverse migrant teacher groups in various cultural and professional contexts to explore the universality and particularity of the findings. Comparative studies of different ethnic or professional groups can offer deeper insights into social cohesion and group identity dynamics. Furthermore, incorporating mixed-methods approaches could enhance the robustness of the findings.

In practice, educational institutions should consider establishing formal mentoring programs and cultural orientation sessions for migrant teachers to ease their transition and enhance integration. Community organizations can also facilitate cultural gatherings and support networks that promote inclusivity and collaboration. Finally, policymakers should recognize the unique contributions of migrant educators and invest in initiatives that promote their professional and personal well-being.

Conflict of Interest Statement:

The authors confirm that there are no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to report.

Acknowledgement:

This work was supported by Walailak University under the New Research Development Scheme (Contract Number WU67277).

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