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### REGULATION, EXPOSURE, RECOGNITION (RER) THEORY FOR IMPROVED ESL TEACHING EXPERIENCE IN CEBU

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#### Abstract

The demand for ESL teachers in Cebu has been increasing from 2004 to present, which boosted Cebu's economy in terms of job opportunities and tourism. This paper explored the lived experiences of the ESL teachers in Cebu, revealing their challenges and opportunities to generate a theory. This study used qualitative Husserlian Phenomenological research design, using Collaizi's qualitative analysis method, as well as inductive theory development approach. The participants were ESL teachers purposively and conveniently selected. The teachers' challenges include issues on social stratification, salary, employment regularization, cultural difference and communication, and teaching competence. The opportunities include improved English communication, exposure to international culture, and local and international opportunities. From the result and themes extracted, RER Theory for Improved ESL teaching Experience in Cebu is generated. It is concluded that regulation of ESL schools in Cebu improves the ESL teachers' social status, competence and experiences and creates local and international economic advantage. It is recommended that regulation government regulation and interagency support on ESL teachers be granted. It is further recommended that HEIs maximize the training of communication and teaching competencies of their graduates to retain quality ESL teachers and capitalize on ESL economic potential.

#### Introduction

The demand for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in Cebu to international non-English native students has increased since the year 2004. To date, Technical Educational Skills Development Authority (TESDA) a government bureau for directing standard quality technical education in the Philippines registered 64 ESL schools in Cebu. Not only because of Filipinos' proficiency at English, the influx of international students learning the language is also caused by the relatively more affordable but quality English as a Second Language (ESL) programs being offered locally (inquirer.net). According to the ICEF Monitor, a dedicated market intelligence resource for the international education industry, English language courses lasting several weeks including accommodation and meals approximately cost Php 43,000.00 to Php 83,000.00 a month for a single international student (cebudailynews.inquirer.net). This figures create opportunities for Philippine economy as well as tourism.

On the other hand, unlike the mainstream teaching, ESL teaching is rarely recognized as professional teaching in Cebu. As a matter of fact, when ESL teachers apply for public Basic Education teaching position, their years of experience as ESL teachers are less likely given credit. Although stated in D.O. 7, s 2015 number 7.2., that a point of 0.15 per month is given to the applicant who come from schools and institutions that are government accredited, the point allocation for ESL teaching experience is always debated during the ranking period.

ESL teachers considerably make-up a large portion of the labor force in Cebu. Aside from the fact that ESL teachers represent a culture, educational practices and language teaching competence to international students, the city's economic potentials where ESL schools are situated is high. Considering the demands for quality ESL instructors, exploring the experiences of ESL teachers provides the practitioners, readers and researchers a better perspective of the challenges and opportunities of the teachers, whereby improving their working conditions and country's labor potentials.



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT

### Research Inquiry

This phenomenological research explored the challenges and opportunities of the ESL teachers in Cebu. This seeks to cultivate a better understanding of the teachers' experiences in ESL teaching. At the end of this study is a theory generated, which helps teaching practitioners and policy implementers improve the experiences of the ESL teachers and maximize ESL economic potentials.

### Methodology

This study employed qualitative, descriptive Husserlian phenomenological research. Husserl (1962) argued that phenomenology clarified the sense of the existence of the real world, where through qualitative research human problems are explored and understood (Creswell, 1998). In order to bracket, the researcher's judgment is suspended "epokhe" to purely describe the data collected (Giorgi, 2009).

Purposive and convenient sampling were used in selecting research participants. The participants are 13 ESL teachers who are employed for at least 1 year in their respective schools and are Teacher Education graduates. The number of respondents are pre-determined to assure saturation of data. A researcher made semi-structured interview guide was used to collect the rich experiences of the research participants. Using Collaizi's data coding and analysis method, themes for challenges, opportunities and overall experiences were extracted. The themes were described and supported by the actual statements of the research participants, hence concepts are mental images that symbolize ideas of a person or events (Fox, 2007). Using the result, a theory was generated employing inductive theory development approach.

Research ethics was established before, during and after the conduct of research, which includes: the provision of a letter of consent to the research participants, stating the process of research and data collection; using of pseudonyms for each participant for identity anonymity; destroying of audio recording after the coding of interview transcripts; and empowering the research participants to verify the interpretation made (Creswell, 202).

### Results and Discussion

Based on the themes extracted, the challenges and opportunities of the ESL teachers are discussed below:

#### A. The Challenges of the ESL Teachers in Cebu

**Theme 1: Society's low regard on ESL teaching in Cebu.** ESL teachers contended that Filipinos in general discredited professionals who are working as ESL instructors. This caused low self-esteem of the ESL teachers. Not only that their experiences are not credit in DepEd public ranking, the society including their parents and relatives have low regards in ESL teaching.

*"My parents pushed me to quit from ESL teaching and apply for public ranking, but has no idea what job satisfaction ESL teaching has brought upon my life. Even my relatives and former classmates asked why I landed on ESL job when I graduated as Cum Laude in a prestigious university in Cebu."*(Teacher Amy)

This experiences of the teachers showed evidence of the existence of social stratification in the Philippines, where people are ranked according to their status. People create stratification system to remain in power and seek power recognition (Marx 1911). Being at the lower rank of the social ladder causes low self-esteem on people and creates inner conflict. Social stratification results to disparity due to unjust system monopolized by a particular group with power (Karachi, 2011).

**Theme 2: Issues on Salary and other Benefits.** The average salary of an ESL teacher in Cebu is P134,292.00 per year, excluding the bonuses provided according the teachers' performance and popularity level (payscale.com). This is verified by the ESL teachers. According to them, some teachers are paid by hourly rate while others are paid below the minimum rate. This salary scheme changes from time to time depending on the number of enrolled students.



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT

*“I have worked for already two years, but because this month is off-peak, which means very few students are employed I am paid by hourly rate, however, I am not allowed to go out when I have no students enrolled in my class for a particular period. There was a time when I got a high salary, that was when we have many students enrolled. However, we were not informed about this when we were hired, but I need a job. . . .” (Teacher James)*

The changes of the salary scheme of the ESL schools exposed the financial conditions of the ESL teachers in Cebu. Changes of the salary schemes based on the number of student enrollees indicate uncertainty of employment and instability of individual economy of the employees. Under the Presidential Decree 442, Title 2 - Chapter 4, Article 117, *Deduction to ensure employment, which states that*, “It shall be unlawful to make any deduction from the wages of any employee for the benefit of the employer or his representative or intermediary as consideration of a promise of employment or retention in employment”. The changes of the salary scheme is considered as the absence of a lawful implementation of the Presidential Decree.

Another issue is the mandatory benefits for teachers as stated below:

*I do not know if my school is registered by TESDA or not, but for sure not because we do not have benefits such as SSS, Philhealth and Pag-ibig. My friend who is working in another ESL school enjoys these benefits.”(Teacher Gabby)*

This issues on salary and other benefits experienced by the teachers are indication of the lack of regulation implementation or weak monitoring of ESL schools by the government. This could be detrimental to the emotional, financial and social stability of the teachers.

**Theme 3: Issues on Regularization of Employment.** Teachers are aware of the existence of regularization policy in the Philippines, however, due to the existing structure and system of ESL programs, the teachers could not demand of regularization.

*“I worked for already three years, I was supposed to be regular, yet when my contract was renewed two months ago, I got another 1 year of contract-based employment. I need a job to support my family, so I just let it be.”(Teacher Rojen)*

This contract-based employment in ESL schools calls for strict labor policy implementation and monitoring towards ESL employment in Cebu. Government regulated and monitored businesses ensure the welfare of the employees at the same time improves the services provided to the clients. Neglecting the existence and importance of the ESL teaching sectors is detrimental not only to the teachers but also the economy of the city and the country in general.

**Theme 4: Culture Differences.** During the first year of the teachers, they experience culture shock. International students have different orientations and expectations from the teachers. The culture of the international students are different to the Filipinos, and when different cultures meet in the classroom, it is a challenge for the teacher to cater each of the students’ expectation and learning needs.

*“It is very challenging, students in the classroom have different nationalities and different expectations of the class. They expect the teachers to be perfect at everything. They want the teachers to know everything, to be on-time, let the students communicate, give the best and most strategic input, it is not enough for the students to know about the language, just like what is taught in the mainstream Filipino classrooms, in ESL classrooms, language should be communicated. Our training in school is too far different from how we should train and improve the students’ language competence.”(Teacher Yanny)*

Because the world is becoming internationalized, adjusting to the diverse culture is a necessity not only for ESL teachers but also for teachers of mainstream schools that are open for international students. This implies that Teacher Education students trained in understanding and adjusting to diverse international culture will have an edge and could adjust easily in ESL teaching.



**Theme 5: English Communication and Teaching Competence.** The qualifications for ESL teaching do not limit to Teacher Education major in English graduates. Anyone who graduated for a four-year course if interested and willing to be trained are qualified to teach ESL. This caused the dilemma when it comes to communicating proficiently and teaching English accurately. Teachers whom students observe to have lacked the English competence become less popular and most likely have less enrollees even during the peak season, where many students enrolled, which affects the teachers' salary and performance incentives.

*"We have to be really good at speaking in English with the American or British accent, and that we could explain simple to complex concepts related to English language especially grammar, the use of words in a sentence, the specific difference and functions of words and grammar in a sentence. We must have a very high English teaching skills or else we don't have students and get fired. Being perfect all time as teachers is very stressful."*(Teacher Cathy)

The qualifications as well as the demands of the ESL teaching jobs require schools, not only those who produce teachers but all others, to create opportunities for students to master English competency not only that they could be employed in ESL teaching jobs but in other industries where the clients come from different nationalities around the globe. The international students' expectation on the English competency of the ESL teachers implies that the 4 years in college is very significant in polishing the English competence of the 4-year college graduates.

## B. The Opportunities of the ESL Teachers in Cebu

**Theme 1: Improved English communication skills.** One of the mandates of the ESL teachers in their respective schools is to communicate using English language everywhere within the school premises. There is also a need to master grammatical rules and pronunciation as a requirement to be recognized as a quality ESL teacher. A highly appreciated ESL teacher is the one who could approximate American or British accent and model these accents to their students. Teacher Amy noted, *"We have to speak in English the whole day every day, 5 times a week, practice makes perfect. I have better vocabulary skills and sound, speaking in English for me becomes easy, I could express and convey my ideas better now."*

This proves that ESL teaching is an avenue for the Filipinos to communicate in English on a daily basis, which improves their sounds English native accent approximation. Teaching ESL is also a potential for the Filipinos to gain the confidence at teaching not only in ESL schools but also in the mainstream Filipino schools using English as a medium of instruction.

**Theme 2: Exposure to International Culture.** ESL teachers handle classes for different nationalities who seek to improve their English communication skills. Their years of teaching ESL have afforded them opportunities to be exposed to international culture and imbibe the positive practices that they observed.

*"At first I had a hard time adjusting to the different needs of the students, but as time goes by, I know the students better and understand my role as a teacher not only in teaching English but also showing to the students how competent Filipino teachers are. The moment ESL teachers understand how the students act and react to situations, teachers find ways to imbibe the international culture and a way become better as a citizen, as a professional by improving my teaching skills."* (Teacher Janice)

*"Now I understand different nationalities better and I am ready to face international challenges, I can be employed in any part of the world because I am ready for the challenge."* (Teacher Cathy)

*"Because of my ESL teaching experience, I work faster now and become very conscious of the time, unlike before I could just let an hour slip away. Now, I waste no time because that is how we practice in school. Time is very important."*



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT

This exposure of the teachers to international culture is a positive indication of the teachers' improved social skills and cultural adaptability, which are imperative in facing an internationalized era. Teachers who have diverse cultural orientation have high potentials (Cai et.al, 1996).

**Theme 3: Better Opportunities Locally and Internationally.** Teachers who have ESL teaching experience given their exposure to international cultures and confidence in communicating using the English language have better opportunities locally and internationally. Strong negotiation skills is one of the gained competence of the teachers along with better perspective in life and open-mindedness caused by their travels to different places in the Philippines and other Asian countries.

*"I believe when I go abroad and have a job I am sure to land in a good job because I gained the skills and characteristics especially teaching, negotiating, tolerance to criticism, aggressive learning and even if I don't work abroad these skills are still needed here in the Philippines. I see myself as emotionally and intellectually stronger because of my training as ESL teacher."*

The skills mentioned above by the teachers are requirements to survive, function and compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century labor market.

Gaining the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills as ESL teacher is a very good opportunity for the Filipinos to compete internationally and stand-out locally, which helps the teachers and the country's economy.

### C. Summary

ESL teachers face situations in their job, which challenge their emotional strength, financial stability and professional competence, however, teaching ESL also provides the teachers great opportunities to become personally and professionally competent, which gives them advantage to improving the local economy and international competence.

### D. Theory Generation

An inductive approach to theory development is employed as follows:

#### 1. Axioms

Based on the result of the study, the following axioms are create

*Axiom 1.1: ESL schools are rarely regulated and monitored by the government which caused challenges to the ESL teachers.* Employee compensation in the Philippines is governed under Presidential Decree No. 442 of 1974 to protect employment and promote social justice ([www.dole.gov.ph](http://www.dole.gov.ph)). Although the Labor laws have long been existing in the Philippines, some labor malpractices are still evident in the Philippine labor sectors, including which is the regularization, minimum-wage implementation or working hours.

*Axiom 1.2: ESL teaching is hardly recognized as a high-esteemed job for Filipino professionals.* The existence of social stratification in the Philippines is based on the evaluations towards a social group and their roles, where people are ranked by position or status. Filipinos expect Teacher Education graduates to have landed in the job where mainstream teaching is applicable. This social dogma has deep-seated in the minds of the Filipinos, where jobs are ranked according to what the people perceived as highly honorable. For one, doctors are of high social status compared to farmers or teaching in the mainstream schools have a higher social regard compared to teaching in the ESL schools.

*Axiom 1.3: Exposure to international culture both gives the teacher a culture shock to culture difference yet improves the ESL teachers' perspective and teaching practices.* People exposed to international culture have high intercultural competence. Exposure to stress due to culture adaptation results in high intercultural communication skills (Cai & Rodriguez, 1996). Social skills which include flexibility and management of behavior of different individual orientation are developed during intercultural exchanges.

*Axiom 1.4: ESL teaching mostly provides opportunities for the teachers to become competent at intercultural*



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT

*communication and in teaching English.* As ESL teachers become more oriented to teach international students and adjusted to diverse culture, they have increased their opportunities to achieve high intercultural communication skills. One of the many skills that intercultural communication brings is the ability to negotiate. During intercultural exchanges using English as the medium of interaction, the ability to clearly convey a message, proficiency with English and other foreign language are honed.

*Axiom 1.5: Through intercultural communication, ESL teaching usually gives the teachers an advantage for local and international economic opportunities.* One of the many skills that intercultural communication brings is the ability to negotiate, which increases the individuals marketability in the global workforce (Sinden, 2014).

### 2. Propositions

Based on the axioms, the following propositions are made:

Proposition 2.1: Government regulated and monitored ESL schools create a better impact to the society and will improve the status of the ESL teachers in the society. (Axiom 1 and 2)

Proposition 2.2 : ESL teaching provides exposure to international culture, which gives the teachers advantage for local and international opportunities. (Axiom 3, 4 and 5)

Proposition 2.3: Culturally adjusted, competent ESL teachers are asset to the city and country's economic boost. (Axioms 3, 4 and 5)

### 3. Hypothesis

Based on the proposition, the following hypothesis are made:

Hypothesis 3.1: Government regulated ESL schools offer better experiences and improved social status of ESL teachers, and make them as asset to the city and country's economic boost.

Hypothesis 3.2: Exposure to ESL teaching through intercultural communication opens opportunities for the teachers to become culturally adjusted, competent at teaching locally and internationally.

### E. Theory Generated

Based on the hypothesis, the theory below is generated.

#### ***Regulation, Exposure, Recognition (RER) Theory for Improved ESL Teaching Experience in Cebu.***

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Regulation of ESL schools in Cebu improves the ESL teachers' social status, competence and experiences and gives them more opportunities for improving local economy and creating international advantage.

It is therefore recommended that regulation and monitoring of ESL schools should be implemented by the concerned government agencies in order to improve the work conditions of the teachers as well as their status in the society, a salary regularization and the provision of compulsory work benefits be granted in order to retain quality ESL teachers and capitalize ESL economic potential. ESL schools be given proper government interagency support credit on job experience of the teachers upon entering public schools and to improve their working conditions and maximize their opportunities. Further, Higher Education Institutions need to enhance the experiences and competence of college graduates for better English communication and teaching competence. HEIs ensure English communication skills training be emphasized

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