FILIPINO GRADUATE STUDENTS IN FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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Abstract:

This phenomenological study aimed to understand students' experiences in foreign universities. This study recorded their lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights. Moreover, it involved 14 students from Africa, Asia, and the United Arab Emirates, selected using purposive sampling. They underwent in-depth interviews and focus group discussions using validated research instruments. The findings of this study revealed that the graduate students had the following experiences: A high standard, quality education, interaction with different nationalities, personal and professional growth, alignment with academic qualifications, acquired an edge when applying for jobs, affordability and accessibility, availing of the latest technology, acquired training in leadership, competence, and confidence, value and recognition, authentic classroom environment. Regarding challenges, the themes were: language adaptation and cross-cultural communication, support networks as pillars of resilience, conflicting educational objectives, being output-oriented and deliverables-driven, strategic time orchestration across cultural contexts, proactive cultural-linguistic integration, spiritual resilience as an anchor in academic transition, high cost, homesickness and alienation, and recognition of credentials. On coping mechanisms, the themes were: hurdling the language barriers, seeking social support, realigning educational objectives to a higher level, professional pragmatism over emotional investment, coping through time management, researching their language and culture, asking for divine intervention, financial resilience through strategic resource management, navigating emotional geography, managing family separation, and credential recognition anxiety and professional identity reconciliation. As for insights, the themes were as follows: the unique curriculum of the school, the opportunity to live in and learn other countries' cultures and history, edge in the job

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market, faith in God, boosted personal value in the workplace, advice for fellow students, advice for administrators.

SDG # 4: Quality Education;
SDG # 10: Reduced Inequalities;
SDG # 17: Partnership for the Goals.

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1. Introduction

Students who study across borders face lots of challenges. These transnational education programs expanded worldwide. However, students deal with new cultures, teaching styles, and settings. Adapting to these differences requires big adjustments. They may struggle to balance their academic identity. Students often feel confused or conflicted about their experiences change when immersed in contrasting norms. Forming a stable sense of self becomes difficult. The dissonance stems from navigating vastly different contexts. Globalization increased these cross-border programs. However, adapting presents unique hurdles for students (Knight, 2019; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2021; Yao & Garcia, 2019; Findlay, King, Geddes, Smith, Stam, Dunne, Skeldon & Ahrens, 2017).

Moreover, international students often face challenges in adapting to their university environment. Being separated from their cultural roots and placed within unfamiliar systems can lead to feelings of alienation or neglect. This disconnection can adversely affect their motivation, engagement, and commitment to their studies. Many institutions fail to offer sufficient support, often generalizing international students as a single group or overlooking their unique needs. Further research is essential to create inclusive spaces that better address the diverse needs of transnational students (Chaiyasat, 2024; Mercan, 2024).

Furthermore, students studying with foreign instructors often encounter new teaching methods and cultural differences that require significant adjustment. They must adapt to unfamiliar learning styles while instructors work to understand and accommodate the students' cultural norms. Writing assignments can be particularly challenging, as each country has distinct writing conventions, which may confuse both students and instructors unfamiliar with local rules. For some students, taking classes in another language adds to the difficulty, as they may struggle to comprehend and express themselves effectively. Although schools attempt to provide language support, it remains a challenge to adequately meet the needs of all students (Buerkle *et al.*, 2023; Markey *et al.*, 2023).

Further, foreign education is growing, but ensuring quality is a big concern. There are questions about keeping the same standards across different countries. Also, it will help to assess the quality of programs offered abroad. Accreditation and partnerships between schools need careful oversight. Others prefer allowing local differences. More

cooperation is required to create comprehensive quality assurance frameworks (Knight, 2019; Moshtari & Safarpour, 2024; Yas *et al.*, 2024).

On the other hand, more study is necessary to give voice to those crossing borders for study. Many analyses draw on small groups at single colleges, so it is hard to extend findings broadly. We need diverse views beyond Asian learners in Western settings. Long-term designs could reveal how identity emerges over time. Phenomenological methods allow grasping the heart of students' lived experiences. Further research is vital to capture foreign students' journeys (Lyles, 2024; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2021).

Looking at it on way, different nations have various rules surrounding global education programs. These include immigration policies, qualification approval, financial regulations, data protection, and intellectual property rights. Laws often struggle to keep up with rapid change. However, partnerships can improve transparency and establish good practices. Advocacy efforts are needed to pass supportive laws guiding transnational education. Legal and regulatory issues require ongoing focus (Helm *et al.*, 2024; Knight, 2019).

Also, foreign education presents potential, but it also raises moral questions about commercialization, brain drain, and fair access. It can be difficult to distinguish between offering greater access and marketing education as a commodity for export. Programs that take skilled individuals out of developing nations, sometimes without providing a benefit, raise red flags. A researcher raises concerns over transnational education's potential effects on social justice and equity in sending and receiving nations. It is critical to have ongoing discussions on moral behavior (Beduchaud *et al.*, 2024; Knight, 2019).

Therefore, adaption obstacles, fostering belonging, teaching and learning considerations, quality assurance, research gaps, legal and regulatory frameworks, and ethical dilemmas are all important topics in global education. More study, policy development, and international collaboration are required to guarantee that transnational programs offer varied student populations high-quality educational experiences. To inform sensible policy and practice, it is essential to comprehend the lived reality of students (Hunduma & Mekuria, 2024).

Because this expanding educational sector has opportunities and problems, it is fundamental to explore graduate students' experiences in foreign university contexts. Understanding how students traverse cross-border programs can help policies and practices better support positive outcomes as global student mobility rises (Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2021).

Prior studies have yielded significant insights into the variables influencing international students, including academic engagement, identity development, sense of belonging, and cultural adaptation processes. Key challenges faced by students have been discovered through quantitative and survey-based investigations. An in-depth qualitative study focused on students' lived experiences as told in their own words is still required, though (Mohamad & Manning, 2024; Tewari *et al.*, 2024).

Detailed descriptions of a shared phenomenon's essence from the viewpoints of persons experiencing it are possible through phenomenological investigations (Creswell, 2013). They offer a greater comprehension of the interpretations of events outside

quantitative measurements' scope. Isolation, alienation, and marginalization have been highlighted by phenomenological research on the experiences of international students that have already been conducted (Yao & Garcia, 2019).

Considering international education's dynamic and swift expansion, phenomenological research on graduate student narratives can contribute to the existing body of knowledge and offer more sophisticated understandings. This method may highlight common occurrences not found in more extensive research by emphasizing in-depth human narratives. To guide supportive activities, a deeper comprehension of the substance of these students' experiences is the aim.

This study adopts a constructivist interpretive paradigm that places meaning and truth in an individual's subjective reality. A suitable theoretical foundation for investigating international student sojourns is provided by phenomenology. By adopting an interpretive, humanistic attitude to shed light on and give voice to students' lives, the study seeks to expand on the scant qualitative insights into foreign universities' experiences. This descriptive essence can enlighten moral and compassionate actions (Ray, 2024).

Despite the quick growth of foreign university programs, there is a dearth of comprehensive knowledge about students' experiences in these transitional environments. Much research is based on conceptual components disconnected from grounded realities or quantitative outcome measures. Although qualitative research has shed light on important themes, it frequently lacks individuals' emic viewpoints, reflexivity, and phenomenological richness. By offering compelling first-person narratives that encapsulate the core of students' evolving during international travel, our study seeks to close this gap. By bringing attention to often overlooked experiential details, the aim is to enhance and broaden the current literature (Humble & Kamalski, 2021).

While numerous studies have explored the experiences of international students in foreign universities, there is limited research focusing specifically on Filipino graduate students pursuing higher education in their home country. Existing literature often emphasizes challenges faced in transnational or international educational contexts, leaving a gap in understanding Filipino graduate students' unique lived experiences, academic journeys, and socio-cultural dynamics in local universities. This study addresses the lack of localized perspectives on how Filipino graduate students navigate academic expectations, professional growth, and personal challenges within their cultural context. The urgency of this research lies in its potential to inform institutional policies and practices that better support graduate students, enhance academic programs, and foster holistic development, contributing to the overall improvement of the Philippine higher education system.

This phenomenological study aims to shed light on graduate students' actual experiences in international education programs by examining their academic, cultural, and personal challenges and strategies for adaptation and growth. Through in-depth analysis, the study seeks to understand the essence of their lived experiences, emphasizing how these students adjust to diverse educational settings and develop

resilience in the face of unique hurdles. By capturing detailed narratives, this research provides valuable insights into the relationship between academic pursuits and cultural dynamics, highlighting the transformative impact of international education on personal and professional development. The findings aim to inform policies and practices that enhance support systems, ensuring a more inclusive and effective educational experience for graduate students in international programs.

The guiding research questions are:

1) What are the experiences of Filipino graduate students in foreign universities?
2) What are the challenges and coping mechanisms employed by Filipino graduate students in foreign universities?
3) What are the insights of Filipino graduate students in foreign universities?

This study holds global significance as it explores the lived experiences of Filipino graduate students in foreign universities, contributing to the broader discourse on international education and academic mobility. Aligning with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4: Quality Education, it highlights the accessibility and challenges of pursuing advanced studies abroad, fostering insights into policies that promote inclusive and equitable education. Furthermore, the study resonates with SDG #10: Reduced Inequalities, as it examines barriers and opportunities for Filipino scholars in global academia, shedding light on how educational disparities can be addressed. Additionally, by emphasizing cross-border academic collaborations, the study supports SDG #17: Partnership for the Goals, advocating for stronger linkages between Philippine higher education institutions and global universities. Beyond its alignment with these global objectives, the study holds social relevance. It provides a deeper understanding of how international education shapes professional growth, cultural integration, and knowledge exchange, ultimately contributing to national development and global intellectual diversity.

The direct beneficiaries of this study include higher education institutions (HEIs), which can leverage the findings to enhance support systems for Filipino students pursuing graduate studies abroad. By understanding the challenges and successes of these students, HEIs can refine academic programs, establish stronger international partnerships, and implement policies that improve global competitiveness. Students and scholars aspiring to study in foreign universities will also benefit from this study, gaining valuable insights into the realities of international academic life, financial considerations, and cultural adaptation. Additionally, future researchers can build on this phenomenological inquiry to explore related topics such as brain drain, transnational education policies, and the long-term impact of international graduate education on professional trajectories. By shedding light on these critical areas, the study informs educational strategies and empowers Filipino scholars to thrive in the global academic landscape.

This study focuses on the lived experiences of Filipino graduate students enrolled in foreign universities, exploring their academic, personal, and socio-cultural journeys through a phenomenological lens. The scope includes students who have completed in education programs, providing insights into their challenges, coping mechanisms, and

reflections on their educational experiences. Data collection is limited to in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with participants from select universities, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across all foreign institutions. The study does not include undergraduate students or those pursuing degrees abroad, as the focus is on graduate-level education in the local context. Additionally, the findings are inherently subjective and context-specific, reflecting individual experiences rather than generalizable outcomes.

2. Material and Methods

A total of seven participants took part in the in-depth interviews, and another seven participated in the focused group discussions. These participants were international graduate students enrolled in transnational education programs at foreign universities between 2019 and 2022. The sample size was justified based on recommendations for phenomenological research, which typically includes 5–25 participants to allow for detailed qualitative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1989; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The chosen numbers ensured that each participant could provide rich, nuanced accounts of their lived experiences, aligning with the study's goal of achieving an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, a focused group size of six to twelve participants is ideal for stimulating meaningful discussions on shared experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who could provide detailed, information-rich insights into their experiences. This method allowed for deliberate, criteria-based selection to ensure the relevance and richness of the data (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). Including 7 participants for the in-depth interviews and 7 for the focused group discussions reflected a diverse range of linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, which was essential to the study's qualitative approach. Criterion sampling, a specific form of purposive sampling, was used to enhance transferability by focusing on individuals who had recently encountered the phenomenon of foreign education (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The study focused exclusively on graduate students who had completed their education entirely within the international school system, from enrollment to graduation, between 2019 and 2022. Current undergraduate students were excluded due to the potential differences in their experiences compared to graduates, as the research aimed to capture the long-term implications of global education. Participants were fully informed of their rights, including the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. If participants chose to withdraw, their data were immediately and securely deleted. This approach ensured ethical compliance and maintained participants' autonomy throughout the research process.

The interview guide was meticulously designed to facilitate comprehensive, in-depth discussions with participants, employing open-ended questions to elicit detailed narratives about their international educational journeys. The questions covered various aspects, including cultural adjustment, academic experiences, social interactions, support

systems, and personal development. This semi-structured format provided consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility to explore unique participant experiences. The guide aimed to capture participants' reflections, coping with mechanisms and challenges, and fostering a holistic understanding of their lived experiences.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the interview guide, it underwent expert validation by a panel of six professionals with expertise in international education and phenomenological research. These experts evaluated the guide for its alignment with phenomenological principles, clarity, and relevance to the study's objectives. Iterative revisions were made based on their feedback until a consensus of at least 100% appropriateness was achieved, and its rating is 15 or very good. Additionally, member checking was employed, allowing participants to review and validate their interview transcripts, further enhancing the credibility and rigor of the data collection process (Candela, 2019).

2.1 Design and Procedure

To begin with, this study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Filipino graduate students in foreign universities. Phenomenology was selected as it offers a framework to capture the essence of participants' academic, personal, and socio-cultural journeys. This design emphasizes subjective experiences, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and reflections unique to the participants (Mason, 2024; Paudel, 2024).

Building on this foundation, a descriptive phenomenological approach was employed to reveal common themes and shared meanings among participants. Phenomenology, the study aimed to set aside researcher biases to preserve the authenticity of participants' perspectives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which allowed participants to share their experiences in depth and detail (De Boer & Zeiler, 2024; Lim, 2024).

In conducting the study, the researcher enacted an essential responsibility as an instrument for data collection, facilitating interviews and ensuring a neutral stance. To further enhance objectivity, the researcher practiced bracketing by setting aside personal assumptions and biases. The researcher encouraged participants to share their narratives comprehensively and authentically by fostering a respectful and open environment.

With the groundwork established, data collection followed a systematic, step-by-step process. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling and provided informed consent before any interaction. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were guided by a conversational tone, allowing participants to share their stories freely. Audio recordings were made with permission, and field notes captured contextual nuances. The transcripts were prepared promptly, ensuring data accuracy and readiness for analysis.

Following data collection, analysis was conducted using Colaizzi's method to ensure a thorough and systematic exploration of the participants' experiences. Initially, the researchers immersed themselves in the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts. Significant statements were extracted, and meanings were formulated to reflect the

participants' lived experiences. These meanings were grouped into thematic clusters and synthesized into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. Definitively, member checking was performed to validate the findings and ensure accuracy (Macapobre, 2024).

To further strengthen the study, trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For credibility, prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, and triangulation were employed. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the context and findings, while dependability was maintained via an audit trail documenting all research decisions. Confirmability was ensured by consistently bracketing biases and adhering to a neutral analytical process (Ahmed, 2024).

Conclusively, the study adhered to ethical standards as outlined by the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC), with approval granted under UMERC Approval Number 2024-256. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from participants after explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing personal data and securely storing audio recordings and transcripts. These ethical measures ensured the protection of participants' rights and upheld the integrity of the research process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Experiences of Filipino graduate students in foreign universities

Table 1 below offers a comprehensive overview of the diverse academic, cultural, and social experiences encountered by students pursuing higher education across international borders. As foreign education becomes increasingly prevalent, graduate students face unique opportunities and challenges that shape their learning journeys. This table captures a range of personal and academic experiences, providing valuable insights into how students adapt to new environments, engage with multicultural communities, and manage the demands of global education systems.

The findings of this study have significant implications for both practice and policy. First, institutions in the Philippines can enhance their academic programs by incorporating global best practices and increasing international collaborations. Second, policymakers should consider expanding scholarship opportunities for students seeking international education, ensuring equitable access to high-quality learning experiences. Lastly, employers should recognize the value of international education in fostering a globally competitive workforce. These steps will help bridge the gap between local and international education, ensuring that Filipino students can maximize their academic and professional potential.

Table 1: Experiences of Filipino graduate students in foreign universities

Themes	Significant Statements	Code
A High Standard, Quality Education	*I feel like this is where I belong, and I have seen that their master's program is quite advanced compared to other schools, so I chose this school.*	IDIMJQ1
	The QS ranking of the school is high.	IDIRUBYQ1
	The reputation of the school versus the course that I'm going through. So that's a very integral part of my decision.	IDIR5Q1
	Number one is prestige. Being a graduate from abroad gives me the prestige and the edge when working.	IDIR5Q1
Interaction with Different Nationalities	*I've always wanted to have global exposure and to meet different kinds of people with different backgrounds and cultures, as well as be exposed to an international type of academic curriculum.*	IDISALLYQ1
	You will learn so many things about other people's culture and also the environment of the places where you go.	IDIAMARIQ1
	I can easily adapt to the people because I was working, I was studying in Dubai which has more than 400 nationalities.	IDIR5Q1
Personal and Professional Growth	*I believe that the world now is geared more toward business and management. And I believe that most of these skills are attainable, something that I can reach by enrolling in this course.*	IDIR5Q1
	It's an International School and actually, it is a privilege for me to study here. It's a privilege and I am happy because I came here to graduate and I have received my diploma already.	FGDPAR2Q1
	I chose a master's in education because this is one of my passions for both learning and teaching, so I wanted to deepen my understanding of educational theories, practices, and methodologies.	FGDPAR5Q1
Alignment with Academic Qualifications	*I have to align my PhD with my MBA and undergrad; so my first PhD was in educational management which is not in alignment with my program as an MBA and accountancy so that's the reason why I enrolled here in Dubai.*	IDIANNQ1
	I chose this program for alignment with my accountancy and PhD business management.	FGDPAR1Q1
Acquired an Edge When Applying for Jobs	*Having international credentials is an advantage when you apply for jobs.*	IDIMJQ1
	Being a graduate abroad gives me the edge in applying for a job; of course, if they knew that I graduated from universities outside the Philippines, I would be greatly considered for employment.	IDIR5Q1
Affordability and Accessibility	*I chose the transnational school because it's more accessible during the pandemic and it's the best choice to enroll during that time.*	FGDPAR3Q1
	The school is affordable and accessible; in this case, since it's online so it's easier for me to work and study at the same time.	IDISALLYQ1
Availment of the Latest Technology	*The courses or the education systems that are not available in the Philippines which are only available technologically abroad.*	IDIR5Q1
	The edge in implementing new things or new innovations in my company.	IDIR5Q1
Acquired	*My professors gave us tips for assessments, critical review, and literature review.*	IDIRUBYQ1

Training in Leadership, Competence, and Confidence	*We learned many kinds of leadership skills and leadership styles.*	IDIRUBYQ1
	The resilience and grit that I learned when I was there, knowing different types of people, and different kinds of attitudes.	FGDPAR5Q1
Value and Recognition	*Being a graduate abroad gives me the prestige and the edge when working.*	IDIR5Q1
	People recognize me in my country.	IDIR5Q1
	I have received my diploma already, since it is a US curriculum, so I am really privileged and honored. It also paved our way to go here in the UAE since we have to join the graduation.	FGDPAR2Q1
Authentic Classroom Environment	*I learned from the authentic experiences of other students in other countries, not just Google everything like in the Philippines.*	FGDPAR4Q1
	The learnings are applicable to my work and my personal experience.	IDIR5Q1
	I was able to take advantage of its immersion program with different countries and have a chance to be at Harvard University as part of the immersion program.	IDIANNQ1

2.2 Challenges and coping mechanisms employed by Filipino graduate students in foreign universities

The table below presents a detailed exploration of the difficulties these students face and the strategies they utilize to overcome them. As students through the densities of foreign education—such as language barriers, cultural differences, academic pressures, and adapting to unfamiliar environments—understanding both their challenges and the ways they cope is dynamic for institutions seeking to support their success. Further, table provides key insights into the common obstacles encountered by graduate students and the diverse coping mechanisms they employ, shedding light on the resilience and adaptability required in transnational education settings.

Table 2: Challenges and Coping Mechanisms Employed by Graduate Students in Foreign Universities

Theme	Challenges	Coping Mechanism	Significant Statements
Language Adaptation and Cross-Cultural Communication	Hurdling the language barrier	- *"For social communication, I use my native language to communicate with my classmates and mentors."* (IDIJESSAQ2) - *"I studied Arabic."* (IDIRUBYQ2) - *"I speak with them in Arabic, with current students and colleagues."* (IDIRUBYQ2) - *"I tried to study and learn their language like going online and checking how they speak their language in the basic form and the simplest word that I can recall just to help me*	- *"I must make some adjustments because I am not used to these terms. There are different meanings in our local terms compared to theirs, but adjusting so, to my experience, would also allow me to grow in terms of using language."* (IDIMJQ2) - *"I tried to study and learn their language like going online and checking how they speak their language in the basic form and the simplest word that I can recall just to help me socialize with different nationalities."* (IDISALLYQ2)

		socialize with different nationalities." (IDISALLYQ2) - *"Learn and master at least 50% Arabic."* (IDIRUBYQ2)	
Support Networks as Pillars of Resilience	Seeking social support	- *"The most effective strategy is meeting my peers and professors outside of school. This way you can bond and connect with them in a deeper way and understand what and how they feel and how they interact, which is beneficial for me as a transnational graduate. "* - *"My family has been very helpful in terms of emotional and mental support; my hopes and dreams after studying is that I want to be employed in a multicultural company to meet more people with different backgrounds and explore more about the world."* (IDIJESSAQ2)	- *"You need a social support system with whom you can share problems in life with." ."* (IDIJESSAQ2) - *"The things which helped me to overcome challenges as a transnational graduate are resilience and perseverance, adaptability and flexibility, seeking a support system and guidance, self-care and especially God."* (IDIJESSAQ2) - *"I have a very good family support, to be honest, My family, especially my husband, is very supportive. My support system is very strong."* (IDIRUBYQ2)
Conflicting Educational Objectives	Realign educational objectives to a higher level	- *"I must because I have this objective in life to be, to be in a university. That requires an alignment of my educational attainment."* (IDIANNQ2) - *"Balancing my home country's educational expectations with the host institution's academic standards requires constant adaptation and strategic planning, especially when research methodologies differ significantly between cultures."* (FGDPAR4Q2)	- *"The challenge lies in reconciling my previous learning approach with the current system's requirements – while my home education emphasized theoretical mastery, here they prioritize practical application and critical analysis."* - *"I find myself constantly negotiating between maintaining my cultural academic identity while embracing new pedagogical approaches; sometimes these educational philosophies clash, requiring me to develop flexible learning strategies."*
Being Output Oriented and Deliverables-Driven	Professional Pragmatism Over Emotional Investment	- *"Learning to compartmentalize personal feelings and focus on measurable outcomes became a crucial survival skill in navigating the transnational academic and professional environment."* (FGDPAR1Q2)	- *"What matters is the output or the deliverables that you're delivering to the company."* (FGDPAR1Q2) - *"The transition from an emotionally attuned workplace culture to a deliverable-focused environment demanded a fundamental shift in my professional approach, teaching me to prioritize tangible results over emotional investment."* (IDIAMARIQ2) - *"Adapting to a result-oriented environment taught me to balance my inherent emotional intelligence with practical professional demands, transforming what initially seemed like a challenge into a competitive advantage."*

Strategic Time Orchestration Across Cultural Contexts	Coping through time management	- *"Time management; you need to learn how to properly manage your time."* (IDIJESSAQ2) - *"Managing time in a transnational academic setting requires more than scheduling study hours – it demands strategic allocation of resources between mastering course content, adapting to new cultural norms, and developing cross-cultural communication skills."* (FGDPAR3PQ2)	- *"The strategies I did to cope with my problems and challenges being a transnational student are first, time management."* - *"The challenge lies not just in organizing daily tasks, but in creating a sustainable balance between academic excellence and cultural immersion, where every minute invested must serve multiple purposes in both educational and cultural growth."*
Proactive Cultural-Linguistic Integration	Researching on their language and culture	- *"I made some adjustments; one of these is the research I made sure just to understand their terms in everyday communication."* (IDIMJQ2) - *"I tried to study their culture and languages as well as proper time management in terms of studying and doing my assessment and preparation for my classes and examinations."* (IDISALLYQ2)	- *"To fully understand the local language as a language barrier, I did some research. Like asking people around what the meaning of this term is, and of course doing some Google for me to understand and to relate to the thoughts they would like to deliver, and for me also to (be) related to my academic performance."*
Spiritual Resilience as an Anchor in Academic Transition	Asking for Divine intervention	- *"God. Don't forget to pray and seek always the guidance of our creator."* (IDIJESSAQ2)	- *"I really capitalized heavily on the spiritual aspect of my life, knowing that I still have God as my prodigy, or as my pillar if I have challenges, if I face challenges in life."* (IDIR5Q2)
High Cost	Financial Resilience through Strategic Resource Management	- *"The financial demands of transnational education foster the development of crucial life skills, as students learn to maximize limited resources while maintaining academic performance and quality of life."*	- *"It's pricey, you know, and it's quite expensive."* (IDIRUBYQ2) - *"Adapting to the high costs of international education requires creating innovative financial solutions, from seeking alternative funding sources to developing resourceful approaches to academic and personal expenses."* (IDIJESSAQ2)
Homesickness and Alienation	Navigating Emotional Geography, Managing Family Separation	- *"The experience of studying abroad while separated from family necessitates developing a resilient mindset that acknowledges homesickness not as a weakness, but as a natural part of the international education journey."* (IDIR5Q2)	- *"Separation from the family, kasi yung homesick talaga yung kalaban natin pag andito tayo sa abroad."* - *"I feel like a stranger; a total stranger because everything is new, and I have to adjust."* (IDIMJQ1)
Recognition of Credentials	Credential Recognition Anxiety and	- *"Managing anxieties about credential recognition requires developing a dual professional identity that values both international exposure and local relevance, leading students*	- *"On the recognition of credentials; as Pinoys, we always insist in our minds that if it is US credentials, it cannot be credited in the Philippines."* (IDIJESSQ1)

| Professional Identity Reconciliation | *to actively seek ways to make their transnational education meaningful across different professional contexts."* (FGDPAR4Q2) | *- "The challenge of navigating credential recognition becomes a transformative journey, pushing students to develop a more global perspective on educational value while maintaining awareness of home country requirements – transforming what could be an obstacle into an opportunity for broader professional development."* |

The findings of this study have significant implications for higher education institutions and policymakers. Universities should strengthen international student support programs by providing language assistance, financial aid, mental health resources, and academic orientation sessions. Policymakers should facilitate credential recognition and create scholarship opportunities for transnational students. Employers should recognize the value of global education and provide pathways for international graduates to transition into the workforce. Addressing these challenges will ensure that Filipino graduate students in foreign universities receive the necessary support to thrive academically and professionally.

2.3 Insights of Filipino graduate students in foreign universities

As foreign education extends, understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by graduate students enrolled in institutions across different countries is crucial for both educators and policymakers. The following table provides a comprehensive overview of the insights gathered from graduate students, offering valuable reflections on their academic, cultural, and social experiences within the transnational education framework. These insights serve as a foundation for identifying areas for improvement and enhancing the overall student experience in such diverse and dynamic learning environments.

Table 3: Insights of Filipino Graduate Students in Foreign Universities

Themes	*Significant Statements*
Unique Curriculum of the School	*- "Overall, my educational experience was good, and for me, the factor that contributed to my satisfaction was mostly the quality of education; the cost of this program was worth it."* (IDIR5Q3) *- "I see this as a way of growing myself in a different level and environment."* (IDIMJQ3) *- "I had this memorable Harvard University immersion experience."* (IDIANNQ3)
Opportunity to Live	*- "I have the chance to stay in the country and learn about their culture."* (IDIAMARIQ3) *- "I was able to understand the history of a certain country and to interact with the nationalities living inside."* (IDIANNQ3)

in and Learn Other Countries' Cultures and History	- *"I want to be employed in a multicultural company to meet more people with different backgrounds and explore more about the world."* (IDISALLYQ3)
Edge in the Job Market	- *"As a transnational student, I have a wide understanding of global issues and trends. I have the edge now for the job market opportunities."* (IDIJESSAQ3) - *"It gave me the edge to work as a leader; gave me an edge in my leadership skills because they trust me more as they know that I have more ideas, I have more to offer having studied abroad."* (IDIR5Q3) - *"The cost of this program was worth it."* (IDISALLYQ3)
Faith in God	- *"Believe in Allah, believe in God you know."* (IDIRUBYQ3) - *"God, don't forget to pray and seek always the guidance of our creator."* (IDIJESSAQ3) - *"Believe in Allah, believe in yourself, take the risk, value your support system, and then believe in your journey."* (IDIRUBYQ3)
Boosted Value in the Workplace	- *"I was able to define my abilities far beyond what I have known."* (IDIMJQ3) - *"I became more globally competitive by enrolling in this particular program, which is the Masters of Educational Management. I got to know experts. This opportunity was rare."* (FGDPAR1Q3) - *"Having an international degree gives me an edge in job market opportunities."* (IDIJESSAQ3)
Advice for Fellow Students	- *"Don't quit; only losers quit. Take risks."* (IDIR5Q3) - *"Manage your time well as a student as well as get along with everyone and make the most of the opportunity of meeting new people with different backgrounds."* (IDISALLYQ3) - *"The most important advice is to know your greatest why. This gives motivation to do more and challenge your capacities."* (IDIMJQ3)
Advice for Administrators	- *"Add more activities where you have to interact with students."* (IDISALLYQ3) - *"Provide more access for mental and emotional support for students in your transnational school."* (IDISALLYQ3) - *"Please be more understanding of the students. Really support them because it's not easy for them to study abroad."* (IDIR5Q3)

The findings underscore the need for institutions to enhance their support systems for international students. Universities should implement mentorship programs, expand cultural exchange initiatives, and provide career development resources. Policymakers should facilitate global education collaborations and ensure equitable access to financial support for transnational students. Employers must acknowledge the value of international education and adapt hiring policies to leverage globally trained professionals.

4. Implication for Practice and Future Research

Graduate students in foreign universities benefit from a high-quality education blending international best practices with local contexts, fostering adaptability, resilience, and a global mindset. They experience cultural diversity through interactions with peers and faculty from various nationalities, which enhances cross-cultural communication and prepares them for globalized industries. The rigorous academic environment, emphasis on leadership, and use of cutting-edge technology cultivate competence and confidence. Degrees awarded by these institutions are internationally recognized, giving graduates a competitive edge in the global job market while also being more affordable and accessible compared to studying abroad.

To address language barriers, students often engage in intensive language programs or utilize tools like language apps and peer groups. They form social support networks with peers, faculty, and advisors to foster belonging and emotional resilience. Time management is crucial; students employ digital tools, set priorities, and balance their academic and personal lives. For cultural adaptation, many conduct research on local languages and traditions, participate in cultural exchanges, and seek mentorship. Faith and spirituality also serve as anchors, offering strength and comfort during challenging transitions. Financial resilience is supported through budgeting, scholarships, and strategic use of institutional resources.

Graduate students gain a profound appreciation for the unique curriculum that integrates global and local perspectives, enriching their understanding of international and regional issues. They value the opportunity to immerse themselves in diverse cultures and histories, fostering global awareness and intercultural competence. Their foreign education enhances their value in the job market, equipping them with a unique blend of skills sought by international organizations. These experiences also highlight the importance of personal and professional growth, adaptability, and the role of cultural and spiritual diversity in achieving academic and career success.

The experiences, challenges, and insights of graduate students in foreign universities offer valuable opportunities for future research, particularly through a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data. A longitudinal study tracking students from enrollment to post-graduation could shed light on changes in cultural adaptation, academic performance, and career outcomes, helping to identify broader patterns. Expanding research to include perspectives from faculty, administrators, and employers may highlight gaps between student experiences and institutional or industry expectations, providing a more holistic understanding of the transnational education ecosystem. Comparative studies across different countries or regions could reveal how cultural, economic, and political factors influence educational experiences, while specialized research designs, such as case studies, ethnography, and action research, could further explore specific aspects of transnational education. Together, these approaches could enhance our understanding and address challenges like language support and career preparation in this growing field.

5. Concluding Remarks

The study of graduate students in transnational schools has unveiled a tapestry of experiences, challenges, and insights that paint a vivid picture of the complexities inherent in global education. I am struck by the resilience and adaptability demonstrated by these students as they traverse unfamiliar cultural waters while pursuing academic excellence. Their journeys underscore the transformative power of transnational education, not just in terms of academic knowledge, but in fostering global citizenship and intercultural competence. The challenges they face, from language barriers to cultural adaptation, serve as powerful catalysts for personal growth and professional development. This research has reinforced my belief in the importance of creating supportive environments that nurture both academic and cultural learning, enabling students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

Perhaps the most profound realization from this study is the versatile nature of success in transnational education. While academic achievement remains a cornerstone, the true value of these programs lies in their ability to shape adaptable, culturally sensitive professionals equipped to tackle global challenges. The insights shared by students regarding the unique curriculum, cultural immersion, and enhanced job market prospects highlight the far-reaching impact of transnational education beyond the classroom. As a researcher, I am inspired to further explore how educational institutions can optimize these experiences, bridging the gap between academic theory and real-world application in diverse cultural contexts. This study has not only contributed to the body of knowledge in transnational education but has also ignited a passion for continued research into creating more inclusive, effective, and transformative educational experiences for future generations of global leaders.

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Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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