

Filipino Neophyte ESL Teachers amidst Covid-19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Abstract

This phenomenological study investigated the lived experiences of Filipino neophyte ESL teachers amidst Covid-19 pandemic. Data were collected from seven (7) ESL teachers who already have three (3) months to one (1) year teaching experience in handling non-native speakers of English language. Based from the thematic analysis, the experiences of the identified participants were anxiety as initial reaction, fear of committing grammatical and pronunciation errors, difficulty of motivating students, students' lack of knowledge on the target language, difficulty on students' pronunciation and grammar, improves teachers; communicative competence and evaluating students' four macro skills. Moreover, the different teaching strategies used were using reinforcement, various teaching methodologies, utilizing interactive materials, building rapport, tracking students' performance and scaffolding. The findings of this study are valuable in the field of language teaching and applied linguistics to understand the various strategies that can be employed to address the needs of non-native speakers of English language. Further, this can be used by future ESL teachers in improving their pedagogical competence in handling ESL synchronous classes.

Keywords: Filipino, Neophyte ESL teachers, Covid-19 pandemic, phenomenological inquiry

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a profound effect on people's lives. It has created difficulties for a number of the social institutions that make up society, including educational institutions. Almost everyone was forced to work from home, which necessitated the use of digital space—one of the most well-known home-based occupations today is English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Numerous sources indicate that various ESL organizations seek Filipino ESL teachers with or without experience. Additionally, during the pandemic, many people began teaching careers as English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. They are referred to as starting English language teachers or neophyte English language teachers.

They are responsible for teaching English to all learners, whether native speakers or not, as they are the primary facilitators of the language teaching process. Aspiring instructors can begin their career adventure as soon as today or immediately upon graduation. Indeed, multiple stories of Filipino neophyte ESL teachers who lack a professional teaching license have surfaced. Many are recent high school graduates or undergraduates, while others are still awaiting LET results or studying for the LET exam. Dickson (2014) asserts that the early years of teaching are crucial to one's development as a teacher. As a result, becoming a new teacher presents a fresh set of challenges. Indeed, the virus has wreaked havoc on the world's educational systems. As a result, it is evidence that neophyte teachers have additional obstacles during the Covid-19 pandemic, making the job more challenging.

The emphasis on English education has been much more robust in Taiwan recently. The fact that Taiwan made it a compulsory subject in elementary school, specifically from third grade, reflects the said emphasis (Wang, 2009). However, beginning English teachers in Taiwan have some significant issues such as less or bad teaching experience, anxiety, lack of confidence, and lack of English teaching knowledge. Thus, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic worsens the challenges for neophyte teachers. It is a given fact that being new to the profession stresses beginning teachers, but what makes them even more stressed is that they are also dealing with teaching their students from a distance (Etchells et al., 2021).

The predominance of neophyte teacher challenges, difficulties, and battles among neophyte instructors in the Philippines are genuine. According to Goddard et al. (2008), the Philippines has a high teacher turnover rate because 29% of neophyte instructors wish to quit within their second year of teaching, and 10% indicate a strong desire to leave. Oktay (2015) points out that the current status of English language teaching and learning in the Philippines are not attaining the necessary levels in reading, listening, writing, and speaking. It has become a common assumption that Filipino Neophyte ESL teachers are not yet fully equipped to teach English (Tosun, 2012). Thus, the level of English proficiency of the language students is alarming. The critical time for professional development is the first few years of teaching (Farrell, 2009; Warford & Reeves, 2003). Thus, when the pandemic began, which led to the implementation of the new normal, it became even more challenging for neophyte ESL teachers. They are more likely prone to a high-stress level in navigating the remote environment, thus exacerbating the English language situation seamlessly (Toquero, 2020).

Additionally, Vedula-Dinagsao (2013) discovered that unskilled beginner teachers encountered the most significant challenges. Heavy

workloads and a sense of powerlessness in the work environment are only several factors contributing to early teachers ending their professions (Huang, 2021). It was challenging for neophyte ESL teachers in Tagum City to overcome the barriers they encountered during their first week of teaching and even months later. ESL teachers face difficulties teaching the English language to their students, mainly when they cannot comprehend their English instructions, as is the case with Chinese students who have little to no knowledge of the English language. When teachers are new, and their students have a limited or non-existent understanding of English, teachers and students typically struggle to communicate. This is frequently a source of frustration for new ESL teachers who are still adjusting and are not fluent in their students' native language. Additionally, it is difficult for them to search out methods that would most effectively assist them in teaching the English language.

This qualitative study aimed to characterize the experiences of novice Filipino English as Second Language (ESL) teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also intended to examine the coping techniques of neophyte ESL teachers in Tagum City and the insights they received from beginning their first teaching experience during this challenging moment.

This study will benefit many people since it will provide crucial information about the experiences of Filipino neophyte ESL teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic. First, the study will significantly help new ESL teachers today, particularly Filipino neophyte ESL teachers, by providing them with more knowledge about various coping mechanisms they are unaware of. This will be advantageous to them, particularly those still struggling with teaching traditions as new teachers. Future ESL teachers are the study's second category of recipients. This would broaden their understanding of the potential stumbling blocks they would face in their early years of teaching practice. They will also be aware of the problem-solving strategies used by existing neophyte teachers.

Additionally, this will aid parents by allowing them to see their children's challenges as neophyte teachers. This is especially essential given that many ESL teachers nowadays are still in their early twenties. As a result, they will be there to encourage, motivate, and guide their children as they begin their careers as first-year teachers. The study will help parents comprehend their children's difficulties and experiences as new teachers. This will also be beneficial for the students because they will be able to know the experiences of the neophyte teachers. With that, they will learn how to deal with their teachers and interact with them in the most effective ways possible to achieve effective English language learning.

Furthermore, the study will benefit the administration/management by allowing them to be more creative in finding a convenient way to assist neophyte ESL teachers in minimizing their challenges and difficulties in teaching the English language to their students. More training, orientations, or seminars could be provided to better equip instructors with the necessary skills and information for the classroom. They may also help new teachers establish coping mechanisms. Finally, future researchers, particularly those undertaking studies on neophyte ESL teachers, will benefit from this. This will be important for those wanting to conduct language education research, namely English language instruction, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This qualitative study aimed to describe the experiences of neophyte English as Second Language (ESL) teachers in Tagum City, specifically those who were approximately three months - 1 year as ESL teachers. The informants were chosen randomly from different ESL companies in Tagum City with no ranging age as long as they were newbies in teaching who started their teaching careers during the pandemic. Additionally, the data was gathered using the in-depth interview and focus group discussion method.

The section below provides details of the literature and related studies so that readers are guided and given a clear vision of what is being highlighted in the study.

1.1 The Current Situation in the Education Sector

COVID-19 is a virus that was identified in Wuhan, China, in 2019. According to government estimates, the Philippines has imposed quarantine restrictions on around 28 million Filipino students of all academic levels. COVID-19 has produced obstacles and opportunities worldwide, especially in the Philippines, due to the global epidemic. A coronavirus infection outbreak in the Philippines prompted President Rodrigo Duterte to declare an "enhanced community quarantine" (ECQ) in March 2020, restricting population movement while allowing for critical activities to continue (COVID-19). Due to lockout restrictions, non-essential eateries and businesses were compelled to close their doors (Günther et al., 2021)

Many government sectors, particularly education, have worked together to improve students' continuity of learning opportunities. Teachers had to learn to adapt to new educational ideas and teaching approaches they had not been trained in before entering. Several branches of government developed alternative work arrangements in response to the Inter-agency Task Force's (ATF) imposition of security and health regulations on employees. These arrangements protect staff while also meeting the demands of stakeholders. As a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Department of Education has issued an alternate work order for school districts. A work-from-home schedule is adaptable to our needs. Jobs that allow employees to work from home will enable them to do duties in the comfort of their own homes. Only a few workers must return to their previous positions with a skeleton staff. To put it another way, the compressed configuration is a four-day workweek with flexible hours of employment. These precautions are meant to limit the time employees interact with one another, which might spread an infectious classroom (Schleicher, 2020; Covid-19 Memoranda, 2021).

1.2 The Lived Experiences of Neophyte ESL Teachers

English Language Teaching (ELT) has become one of the predominant professions, especially in Southeast Asian countries. The rampant growth of this phenomenon is proven evident in the Philippines. The concept of teaching English as a second language begins with a native

or a non-native English speaker with a complete mastery of the language. They provide lessons according to the mandated curriculum of the academic institution or learning center, which caters to the needs of the learners from basic to advanced English specializations. This involves reading, writing, and specified communication skills in English, such as listening and speaking. These professionals teach foreign languages to students through specific strategies and instruments—commonly referred to as ESL teachers.

ESL Teachers teach non-native speakers of all ages and levels ESL (English as a Second Language). They teach rigorous grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in spoken and written English. They also help students build confidence in everyday language usage. English language proficiency is the primary goal of ESL teachers. ELLs are pupils whose first language is not English. Thus, ESL teachers help these students improve their oral and writing English skills. English teaching-learning pathology will identify the risks, faults, weaknesses, and unhealthy teaching and learning situations. ESL teaching in non-English speaking places is challenging and time-intensive. This means that new ESL teachers confront challenges that slow down and hinder learning. To educate English language learners for their future, teachers must overcome many challenges. Numerous studies have documented the difficulties faced by English teachers. Everyone knows that humans are born with a unique language processing system that allows them to learn languages (Khan, 2011).

Language learning is crucial since it tests thoughts and time. According to studies, individuals who begin a language course in the school achieve essential fluency over time (Finlinson, 2016; Khansir, 2016 et al.; Gudu, 2015). However, studies indicate that this is only 4%, implying that 96% drop out or fail to achieve essential fluency. Additionally, the English language is one of the most difficult to master for various reasons. According to Mohammad et al. (2020), these factors include perplexing spelling and pronunciation and wrong grammar structure. There are still multiple reasons why English as a second language (ESL) students struggle to acquire the language.

Teaching English as a foreign language has traditionally been complex and intricate; it requires more than simply imparting grammar principles, teaching vocabulary, practicing reading and writing, and evaluating students. Additionally, being an effective ESL teacher has traditionally required developing and then imparting a cognitively grounded comprehension of explicit English descriptions. Explaining and using the appropriate phonology, morphology, syntax, and grammar was a hallmark of a successful language learner. Due to the international nature of English, it has been designated as a mandatory course for all students. The overarching goal of English instruction is to equip students with the necessary tools for effective and productive communication in English. ESL instruction benefits students whose first language is not English and whose primary goal is to increase their fluency and knowledge of English. Thus, ESL teacher ensures that students develop fluency in speaking and writing English (Adinuansah, 2018).

In context, Neophyte teachers have started to teach English within three years of completing their language teacher education program; those who had not yet completed three years of teaching after getting initial teacher certification were classified as Neophyte teachers. In their induction years, newly qualified teachers may fight for survival as they try to adjust to an unfamiliar professional community. Hence, neophyte teachers either strengthen their belief that they will become competent teachers or leave the field during this time. ESL Teachers characterize their first teaching experience as a "reality shock." Thus, professional growth is crucial during the first several years of teaching. (Farrell, 2018). According to Aguirre and Faller (2017), LNU neophyte teachers face various problems during their first years of teaching. Lyons (2018) noted that many teachers lack confidence in teaching their students English as a Second Language. According to an article by Candilas (2018), ESL teachers have faced several challenges as neophytes in the mentioned field. They had to pass the screening process through applications and online conferences. Once hired, they must create interactive activities to keep the students engaged constantly. In line with this, ESL teachers' awareness of their students' requirements can help avoid unpleasant student experiences, allowing all students to acquire rich language experiences. Given their lack of proficiency in several elements of teaching convention, lack of understanding of their learners, and lack of awareness about the cultural environment of the school or institution in which they were teaching, neophyte teachers were faced with a slew of obstacles. As a result, the teachers' early years were marked by fears, uncertainties, battles, and problems.

Neophyte ESL Teachers sometimes unconsciously use simple words that are hard to understand when interacting with learners with little to no English language knowledge. This may happen when a teacher gives instructions to their students; some teachers may say, "Let's proceed to the next page" or "Let's continue to the next page," which adults easily understand. However, most students, especially beginners with little to no English language knowledge, will not comprehend their teacher's instruction. To solve the problem, using simple words that are clear for the students will help them quickly understand instructions.

Teaching speaking is difficult for neophyte ESL teachers. According to Al-Hassaani & Qaid (2021), numerous factors can affect students' ability to learn English. Language teaching also faces the issue of first language or mother tongue intrusion. Teachers and students frequently converse in their home language, affecting their English skills. It is also important to remember that different languages have varied stress, intonation, and pronunciation. It is difficult for ESL teachers when students use their native language.

Thus, pupils prefer communicating in their tongue to English. It is typically frustrating for pupils to rethink and restate their thoughts in a new language. Diversifying student groupings so that not all students speak the same native language discourages native language communication and encourages standard language communication (Pande, 2013; Fatiloro, 2015; Mezrigui, 2011).

Neophyte ESL Teachers struggled to teach students who did not speak English (Mackey, 2014). Vocabulary learning is tricky for non-native English speakers who struggle with new word meanings, spelling, pronunciation, proper word usage, and interpreting context. Tuan (2017) reiterated this concern, citing students' inability to build sentences while having ideas about what to say in their home language. Due to a lack of language understanding, pupils become passive in class, preventing active participation. Afzal (2019) asserts that ESL teachers have

a tripled obligation in teaching English because their pupils rely on them to help them learn quickly. Thus, it is difficult for teachers to ensure that students acquire language and memorably learn vocabulary. According to Wang (2009), it is normal for ESL teachers to feel excited and nervous at the same time during their first days of teaching English. There may be questions stuck in their minds on how their students react to them as their teachers, what they will do if their students do not understand them or what if the internet connection turns out to be substandard during the class. However, these first-day jitters are normal whether a teacher teaches abroad or online. For teachers to overcome teacher nerves on their first-day teaching, there are ways for them, such as preparing a familiar routine, creating a backup plan, practicing a lesson plan in advance, and most importantly, remembering that it's not all about them. It's all about how the students can learn the English language effectively.

Furthermore, the first ESL class on the first day is significant as first impressions are a big deal, so teachers must be effective on their first day as ESL teachers. Whether they are teaching kids, teens, or adults when students don't know the teacher yet, they would try and work teachers out to see what kind of teachers they are, so teachers must do well. Teachers must start like they mean to go on, making their English teaching job much more accessible (Coman et al., 2020).

2. Methodology

2.1 Setting and Participants

In this study, the researchers carefully selected the right qualified participants and answered the underlying lived experiences of neophyte teachers in some of the ESL companies in Tagum City. The participants were the key participants in the interview and the source of information for gathering data about the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights of the neophyte ELS teachers. The researchers considered the suggestion of Creswell and Poth (2016) that the number of participants/informants depends on the qualitative design being used. The qualitative method of this study is the phenomenological approach. Thus, the researchers decided to have 14 participants; as stated by Ellis (2016), different textbooks suggest different sample sizes for phenomenological research. In reality, participants comprising 6 to 20 individuals are sufficient for phenomenological study. After all, the data quality is of primary importance rather than the number of participants. The first step in the empirical research process is to obtain concrete and detailed descriptions from people who have experienced situations in which the phenomenon has occurred. Such reports are mainly elicited by conducting interviews (Aagaard, 2017). Therefore, the researchers must select participants who can best inform the research questions and enhance their understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2017). Thus, inclusion criteria were considered in this case to extract the correct information from the suitable participant properly. In the context of the study, the participants must be (a) teachers who are about three (3) months to one (1) year in the teaching field. They must be (b) English as Second Language teachers, specifically those teaching foreigners, and (c) able to expound the experience with common knowledge in their experiences as neophyte/beginning English language teachers. Alongside the said criteria, the willingness of the participant to provide relevant data was taken into significant consideration. Thus, the researchers asked for their "informed consent" as the interviewees are the primary unit of analysis (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000).

2.2 Data Collection

This phenomenological study employed a purposive sampling technique to gather pertinent data subject to requisite analysis. This non-probability sampling involved the researchers' sound judgment in choosing the participants. The researchers chose the said method for it is one of the most cost-effective and time-effective sample methods available. In addition, the researchers used the purposive sampling technique to select participants whose attitudes and availability were compatible with the study based on their judgment. Purposive sampling may be the only appropriate method available if the primary data sources are limited and can be helpful to researchers with limited resources, time, and workforce (Etikan et al., 2016). Therefore, the inclusion criteria set by the researchers served as the parameter in selecting the interviewees to share their lived experiences as neophyte ESL teachers amidst the pandemic. As Creswell (2003) recommended, the researchers invited 14 participants to this study; seven underwent virtual in-depth interview, and the other seven experienced virtual focus group discussions.

2.3 Data Analysis

The responses of the participants were recorded and transcribed. Content and thematic analyses were used and data were grouped by themes and core ideas. These were interpreted and analyzed according to the objectives of the study. Relevant quotes from the responses of the participants were identified to support the findings of this study.

3. Findings

Indicated below are the essential themes and core ideas based from the transcribed data. These were grouped according to the lived experiences and teaching strategies employed by Filipino neophyte ESL teachers amidst Covid-19n pandemic.

Table 1. Essential themes and core ideas about the lived experiences of Filipino neophyte ESL teachers

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Anxiety as Initial Reaction to a New Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● felt that first day was really nerve wracking but stayed optimistic and didn't take the situation negatively ● felt quite nervous but excited at the same time and bothered by random thoughts ● felt really nervous, pressured but happy at the same time ● felt really nervous and afraid not to be effective enough ● first day was nerve-wracking. Felt nervous and afraid to be evaluated as an ineffective teacher ● felt very excited, interested and very challenged ● felt nervous but at the same time, felt that it was easier to teach ● experienced nervousness and mental blackout
Fear of Committing Grammatical And Pronunciation Errors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● felt afraid to commit grammar mistakes and might not be able to be understood by and students and might not also understand the students. ● afraid that bad things would happen such us to commit grammatical errors, mispronounced words. ● afraid to commit grammatical errors and mispronounced words
Difficulty in Motivating Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● some students were not really motivated because of the changes in the current situation. ● Adult students are having anxieties because of pandemic. ● it was not easy to motivate the students since pandemic is happening. Maybe they were not used to feeling so isolated. ● Some students are not willing to learn because when we say pandemic, everyone feels like we are in a mess.
Lack of Prior Knowledge on the Target Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having a student who have little to no knowledge of the English language. ● Since students are not allowed to go to school face to face, they tend to forget some basics of English like basic words because according to them, only time they could be exposed to English language is when they have their English class. ● Students could not also understand complex sentences. There's really a need to find and use simple words and simple sentence. ● Students are not able to understand even basic English. ● It's really hard to teach beginners since you really need to use super basic words, back to ABCD and it's very hard to teach beginners. ● the students' level of understanding of the language is very low ● Having beginner level students who have zero knowledge of the English language. ● It was not easy to make the student understand each word because they entered the ESL world without any background. Some of them don't even know the English letters.
Having a Hard Time with Student's Pronunciation and Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The pronunciation of the students are really hard to understand since it's very hard for them to pronounce some words. ● students' sentence structures are incorrect most of the time. ● Difficulty communicating with the students because of their pronunciation. ● Students have poor pronunciation and sentence structure, they keep on committing mistakes when they construct sentence may it be writing or speaking. ● Chinese and Korean students really have poor pronunciation, poor sentence structure and poor communication skills in general using the English language. ● Students are not good at pronunciation and communication
ESL teaching improves English skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being exposed to English language by using it as a medium of communication and instruction enhances English skills and widens vocabulary. ● ESL teaching helps in practicing the English skills particularly in speaking. ● Consistent use of English language enhances English skills. ● Boosts confidence in speaking using the English language and helps develop English skills, most particularly speaking skills. ● Being regularly exposed in a certain language that is not your first language could help you to be excellent, proficient, improves pronunciation, grammar and widens vocabulary in different context. ● Helps to enhance English language skills and communication skills as well. ● Able to build the foundation in English better in comprehension, vocabulary, and speaking skills.
Evaluating Students Through the Four macro skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evaluating students in their way of speaking, reading, listening and writing. Specifically, on their pronunciation, their fluency, their vocabulary, their sentence construction, or grammar. ● Providing assessments on four macro skills in English. ● Giving activities that requires the use of the four macro skills.

Table 2. Essential themes and Core ideas on the strategies that ESL teacher used amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Need of Using Reinforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● By praising students every time they do great during our class, even though they're not correct, expressions like, "You are getting better day by day," "You are improving", and "Keep up the good work" etc. ● By Encouraging students to speak and participate ● Noticing the little achievements of students ● By giving a lot of compliments. ● By telling them that it's okay to make mistakes because it's part of the learning process. ● By giving virtual rewards, by saying "Very good!" "You're doing great!" "Good job!" because if they feel that their efforts are appreciate ● Giving positive feedbacks and praises
Use of Language Teaching Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● using body gestures while teaching the language where the student makes students understand easily. ● Using Total Physical Response or using e body movements for the young learners for them to understand better the lesson ● Application of communicative learning teaching approach which emphasizes the students' ability to communicate in real-life contexts, and students learn to make requests, accept offers, explain things, and express their feelings and preferences. ● Emphasizing the importance of expressing their ideas despite of grammatical errors committed as part of language acquisition.
Utilize Interactive Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Giving rewards virtually like pictures of a cupcake, ice cream, cupcake, milktea, Korean foods, spaghetti, something makes them to be motivated to strive more and do great. ● Getting the attention of the kids by using cartoons, puppet, or anime ● Using reward system and showing them as their prize when children participate. ● Giving rewards makes them confident and motivated in class.
Building Rapport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building rapport with students makes learning easier as they are not ashamed to engage ● Building a relationship with students is very good strategy to keep in touch with them. ● Rapport makes students comfortable in learning the English language. ● Student feel comfortable to speak up and enjoy the class well.
Keep on Track of the Student's Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Keeping records makes the teachers introspect the effective strategies to use. ● Allows teachers to think of the possible improvements of the teaching strategies to employ. ● Students are well- informed of the progress they make in class. ● It helps students monitor their learning progress.
Scaffolding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scaffolding essentially helps learners attain the target competence of the lesson. ● Learners are guided of the skills and competence they need to exhibit. ● Learners are given the appropriate assistance they need while acquiring the target skills

4. Discussion

Lived Experiences of Neophyte ESL Filipino Teachers

Teachers' Initial Reactions to a New Environment

Most people's initial reactions when beginning a career could be diverse. It could be feeling nervous, excited, happy, optimistic, bothered, pressured, challenged, and everything that everyone can think of during their first day in a job. It is not different for ESL teachers.

With these themes is the statement of Wang (2009), which states that it is normal for ESL teachers to simultaneously feel excited and nervous in teaching English. There may be questions stuck in the minds of the ESL teachers on how their students react to them as their teachers, what they will do if their students do not understand them or what if the internet connection turns out to be harmful during the class. Whether a teacher teaches abroad or online, these first-day jitters are entirely normal.

However, teachers must know not to make it so evident because, according to Coman et al. (2020), the first ESL class or the first day of ESL teaching is essential. After all, first impressions are a big deal. Thus, teachers must be effective on their first day as ESL teachers. Whether they are teaching kids, teens, or adults when students don't know the teacher yet, they would try and work teachers out to see what kind of teachers they are, so teachers must do well. Teachers must start like they mean to go on as it will make their English teaching job much more manageable.

These reactions during the first day of ESL teaching were also the experiences the Filipino neophyte ESL teachers had during their first day as ESL teachers during the pandemic. Most of them felt nervous, and some were excited at the same time. They described how they felt during their first day as an ESL teacher, which can be described as mixed feelings. Some stated they might not be an effective ESL teacher since they are not proficient or excellent in the use of the English language since English is not their first language and they are beginner ESL teachers.

Based on their responses, having mixed feelings during the first day as a neophyte ESL teacher is common. They believe that being an ESL teacher is not an easy job, especially during the first days of teaching. It is normal to have different feelings or reactions since being a beginner is the most challenging experience. But, they did not forget to do their best to become an effective teacher in teaching the language because it is the primary reason their students choose them as their ESL teachers.

Fear of committing grammatical and pronunciation errors

One of the most common things in using the English language is the fear of committing grammatical and pronunciation errors, particularly among language learners. Not only the students have this fear, but also the teachers, specifically ESL teachers. Some ESL teachers experience the fear of committing grammatical and pronunciation errors, especially during their first day in the ESL classroom. They feel this way because the English they are teaching is not their first or native language; that is why they are afraid they will commit mistakes.

In line with this theme, Klanrit et al. (2012) stated that it is normal and rational if teachers have fears on their first day of language teaching. This may be because of inexperience in teaching and having high standards for themselves in teaching. Thus, like many language learners, language teachers also have fears of committing grammatical and pronunciation errors, mainly because they are the ones who should be proficient in the language first before they teach it to their students.

It can be inferred that being a teacher is not a guarantee of confidence in using the English language all the time. There will still be times when teachers feel afraid that they will not commit grammatical and pronunciation errors anymore because there will still be times. Additionally, according to Alexopoulou (2020), some aspects of grammar are challenging for many people who are using English as a second language, so they often make grammatical errors. However, teachers believe they should discourage themselves from the fear of committing grammatical errors because every second language speaker, regardless of age, education, motivation, and learning context, makes grammatical errors. These errors happen even after attentive teaching of the relevant rules and forms and significant exposure to input through activities such as speaking the language in authentic everyday contexts and using it in their familiar surroundings. By simply engaging in these things, one can learn and improve their English skills, precisely speaking abilities.

Difficulty in motivating students

Motivation is the hardest to build in an ESL classroom setting. Some students seem very unmotivated because of many factors, one being the environment or the current situation they are experiencing. Thus, unmotivated students will find it hard to learn English, so the ESL teachers are responsible for teaching the language to the language learners.

This finding conforms with the statement of Seven (2020), which states that motivation plays a significant role in the language teaching process and is necessary for effective learning. The students will be able to use an active learning attitude in class. They will express a keen interest in language learning which can help them to focus students' attention on mastering knowledge when learning motivation is formed. When learning motivation is included, however, for a language teacher, motivating the students in learning the English language can be considered one of the most challenging tasks for them.

Moreover, as stated by Parker (2020), English language teachers and learners are struggling a lot in the current situation. Many of the language teachers' specific strategies do not easily translate into an online environment. Before the pandemic, language learners had face-to-face classes, which is why they feel unmotivated learning in a setup they are not used to. It is challenging for teachers since, in an ESL classroom, the learners need to use English when talking; at the same time, teachers need to provide scaffolds to support the learners during academic discussions, which is very challenging to do in an online classroom environment. Moreover, according to Esra & Çiğdem (2021), some learners and teachers think that technology is isolating, which makes it hard for ESL teachers to motivate the students in the ESL classroom. It gives a feeling of isolation since learner interaction is limited, which is unlikely to be the kind of way the learners are required when using the language in the real world.

Lack of prior knowledge of the target language

Prior knowledge is viewed as an essential factor that influences the student's learning and achievements. The quality and amount of previous knowledge that students possess positively impact their knowledge acquisition and the capacity of the students to use the target language (Hailikari et al., 2008). Thus, having prior knowledge of the target language in the learning process will make it easier for teachers to teach the language. However, many ESL teachers have difficulty understanding their students and making themselves understandable to them since most students lack prior knowledge of the English language. With these themes is the statement of Banks (2008), which states that absolute beginner language learners are challenging to deal with because they have no previous knowledge of the English language. Teachers would meet these students raw like they don't know even the basic ABCs, numbers, and prevalent phrases like "Hello!" and "Goodbye!" They can distinguish nouns and adjectives and even how to form a sentence or question.

Having a hard time with student's pronunciation and sentence structure

Teaching English to foreign learners is a big challenge for ESL teachers since teaching English to them is different from those in the Philippines. According to Rimi (2017), for any ESL/EFL teachers, teaching English to non-native learners is already challenging simply because students are not getting any exposure to the target language. As much as possible, inside and outside the classroom, language learners need orientation to the target language (Nazneen & Zabeen, 2016).

Listening to something in English is already exhausting for language learners, making it hard for them to understand and learn phrases and

sentences. The English language is one of the most difficult to master for various reasons. According to Mohammed et al. (2020), these factors include perplexing spelling and pronunciation and wrong grammar structure. There are still various reasons why English as a second language (ESL) students struggle to acquire the language. There are many problems for young learners in learning the target language. Firstly, students' problem in learning English is pronunciation. They lack the practice to learn English since it is not the second language of most ESL students from China and Korea.

According to what is stated in Spear-Swerling and Brucker (2003), pronunciation can be a problem even for more advanced English language learners. Even though some students have mastered grammar, ESL teachers can still have significant problems being unable to understand the students because their pronunciation is way off. Hence, teachers must know the best approaches possible to teach pronunciation to the students, as it is the most crucial factor that people need to consider when communicating with others. If people mispronounce words, it will just cause misunderstanding, so teachers have to make an extra effort in teaching pronunciation. Secondly, sentence structure is one of the things that foreign learners have difficulty with since, most of the time, they will use English words without applying the rules in the English language or the subject-verb agreement. As a result, teachers have difficulties teaching their language because students struggle with pronunciation and sentence structure.

ESL teaching improves English skills

According to Lee & Heinz (2018), consistency in using the English language could help you improve your English skills; hence, consistent use of the language prevents deterioration in your language proficiency. Just doing language activities regularly makes a big difference in your language skills. Thus, when learning a language that is not your own, it must be parts of your daily life, such as having regular conversations and video calls with friends and family. To acquire a language, you must use it as a communication medium by practicing it daily. Moreover, ESL teaching does well in helping students practice their English skills because consistent use of a language that is not your own can help you develop your skills in such a particular language. As stated by Kabooha (2016), having conversations using the English language is a helpful tool to improve the skills in the said language. Thus, if English is not your native language, but you are regularly using the language, such as talking to people who are studying English, it can help enhance your skills in using the language. In addition, most English language teachers worldwide have English as their second or third language rather than their first language. However, teachers who are not native speakers of the language gain experience in consistently using the English language and become more confident in using the language. Through regularity in the use of the language, they become more proficient, improve their English skills, and even come to suppose an insider identity as English as second language teachers (Richards, 2017)

Evaluating students through the four macro skills

The four macro skills, reading, listening, writing, and speaking, are the basic language skills teachers have been teaching for decades. You must hone your macro skills to use English (Powers, 2010) properly. Thus, in determining if there is an improvement in the students, they would evaluate the students through activities that need the use of all four macro skills together. According to Ramadan (2019), learning a second language depends on listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. These four skills allow the student to comprehend, produce and use the language in effective interpersonal communication. They are often acquired in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and reading are passive skills because learners do not need to produce language; they receive and understand it. Speaking and writing are called active skills because learners are doing these need to have language.

Teaching Strategies Used by Neophyte ESL Filipino Teachers

A need to use reinforcement

Reinforcement plays a vital role in learning the English language. It enhances the students' performance by giving them motivational tools such as rewards, praise, competition, a star, and appreciating their effort in trying to learn the English language (Wahyuni, 2021). The teacher does a good job, friendly, well done, smiling, thumbs up, and applauding the students (Craig, 2019).

Based on the participants' responses, using reinforcement could improve the student's motivation to learn English. They believe that when the students are highly motivated, they will enjoy the lesson and understand better.

Use of language teaching methods

A teacher must make learning the language very easy. Thus, ESL teachers use various teaching methods, learning objectives, and understanding pedagogy that drive them to be more effective and engaging teachers who suit the student's learning capabilities, pace, and needs in learning the English language (Güçü Arslan, & Üstünyer, 2017). TPR is a vital tool to help students understand the meaning of new vocabulary words, and teachers use body movements to show the meaning of the word, especially when it's the first time a student has heard them, they begin to associate a word with physical action and coupling of activities (Liu, 2021). When the teachers utilized TPR, students had fun learning and actively participated in the lesson (Celik et al., 2021). It can also enhance their self-confidence to express themselves and stimulate their desire to learn English (Shi, 2018).

Utilize Interactive Materials

Reward systems effectively stimulate students' learning and motivate their good behavior (Kalsoom, Tahira, et al., 2018). Teachers help students strive to give their best, grab the students' attention, and boost their class participation (Wahyuni, 2021). To attain this, teachers set up a reward system in a conducive and friendly environment. Giving them a sense of achievement for what they've done well is necessary,

increasing their confidence in honing their English skills (Saraswati et al., 2020).

Building Rapport

Rapport builds trust between the students and the teacher. It becomes the fundamental factor in a student's feeling capable and the student's language competence (Archarya, 2017). Thus, establishing rapport could reach their potential in studying English. Girón Chávez, A. et al. (2017) implicates that language teachers establish rapport to help shy students to interact more often in class. Thus students can develop efficient language skills and express and communicate orally using the English language.

Keep on Track of the Student's Performance

Tracking students' performance is essential since it plays a crucial role in knowing the student's learning needs in acquiring the English language and its aspects. ESL teachers are responsible for monitoring the student's improvements and progress during class (Balinas, 2016). Keeping track of the student's performance implicates the teachers' effectiveness (Donley, 2019).

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is considered one of the best strategies because teachers must guide students to become independent and automated learners in learning English. With the use of support from the teacher, students can finish tasks that are just a little bit more difficult than they could have done on their own through the use of scaffolding (SM Abdelshaheed, 2019). This method is based on Lev Vygotsky's belief that children learn best when teachers help them build on what they already know, have abilities, and are capable of. Thus, they will make learning the English language less intimidating.

5. Conclusion

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study includes the perspectives of Filipino neophyte ESL teachers on their language teaching, as well as the strategies and insights they have gained throughout their journey as beginning teachers of the English language. Filipino neophyte ESL teachers expressed their thoughts on what novice teachers would commonly encounter in teaching the English language and how they cope up with the challenges, especially in this current situation of pandemic where most of the students are unmotivated to learn. While teachers do their utmost to deliver the discussion, it has been shown from the data gathered that ESL teachers still struggle in their language teaching and experience difficulty to have a smooth teaching-learning process since they can not communicate well with their students given that most of the students are having a hard time with pronunciation, sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary which mostly make it difficult for teachers to understand their students. Additionally, it has shown that the Filipino neophyte ESL teachers amidst the Covid-19 pandemic encounter students who are unmotivated due to the current situation, making it more challenging for them to help students master the target language.

Through this study, the researchers developed a sense of values that emphasize the importance of patience and understanding. It is important to gain a thorough understanding of our participants' circumstances. Not all of them are capable of responding to our texts or emails. Since they have workloads and have other responsibilities to do before they finally responded to us and we had a hard time ensuring the participants' schedules coincide for the FGD interview, we were able to learn the importance of understanding. The strong value of patience was instilled in our minds because we faced several obstacles along the way that might have slowed the process down, but thanks to the value of learning to be patient, we were able to acquire it in ourselves. Moreover, we have acquired a huge amount of realization and values as student-researchers such as realizing that Filipino neophyte ESL teachers really need adjustment when dealing with the foreign students in their language teaching.

Additionally, neophyte ESL teachers are doing their best to exert extra effort and consider the lapses of the students as they are not a native speaker of the English language for the students to be able to be motivated to learn the target language as they feel that their teachers understand them. Also, teachers are considering to give activities to the students that are fun and engaging for their students to naturally learn the target language, not just for compliance. It is always in the minds of the teachers that each student has different learning needs that they need to identify as early as possible, and with that, they are using different techniques and strategies in language teaching. They always find ways to communicate with their students with the best possible approach to find out where their students have most difficulty with so that they can address any difficulties immediately. They also consider the different contributing factors that cause the learning difficulties of their students. Thus, building connection/ communication with the students and finding different approaches in language teaching can improve the teaching-learning process and students are able to develop their English language skills in their journey to conquest learning.

Moreover, despite the difficulties encountered, Filipino neophyte ESL teachers were very eager to teach the target language with the best approach appropriate to each student. In fact, they were finding their own ways to cope up and better deliver the lessons despite all their difficulties given that communicating with foreign students is very challenging. They are even willing to extend their time to ensure that students are able to learn from the discussion.

After conducting this study, researchers have realized that beginning a career as an ESL teacher is very challenging especially participants who started their career as an ESL teacher in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic where most of us are seen to be unmotivated. Thus, we found out the problems arising in ESL teaching and how ESL teachers can cope with their struggles. Truly, doing this research made us reflect the responsibilities of both a teacher and future English educator.

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