

The Foreign Students' Intercultural Communicative Experiences

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Abstract: *This study analyzed and explored the lived experiences of the foreign students in the higher education in their intercultural communications. Employing Hurrserlian qualitative design in phenomenological studies and Colaizzi's 7 steps in data analysis, this study made use of in-depth interview to extract quality data. The foreign students who were the informants of the study have shared candidly their sojourn in the Philippines as regular college students in Southwestern University- PHINMA. Generally, their over-all experiences during their pre and actual sojourn were more on their acknowledgement of cultural differences, adjustments and understanding and how they have coped with the challenges of being in a foreign land especially in terms of expression and communication. Thus, the study came up with 3 significant themes: (1) I love it here, (2) I adjust to cultural differences, and (3) I am never the same person. Based on the data and the organized themes, three propositions were formulated (1) Positive environment leads to ease in communication, (2) Adapting to different cultures requires space and time, and (3) Personal transformations entail motivation, determination and improved perspectives and value of self.*

Keywords: cultural adjustment and understanding, cultural competence, foreigners' sojourn, intercultural communications, wider perspectives

1. Introduction

Globalization together with recent advances in communication technologies and social media has led to a remarkable increase of people's interaction and communication worldwide. The trend towards globalization and internationalization has increased the importance of being competent in communicating with people of different cultural backgrounds.

The possibility of interacting with people of different backgrounds in the daily encounters is greater compared to before (Barnett & Lee 2002; Jensen 2003; Spitzberg 2000). With the impact of technology, Internet and globalization, people have made the world smaller and touring the different continents has become easy. Business transactions involving different nationalities have expanded astoundingly and have reached the global level. The world has become a global village and living with differences both at home and abroad is becoming more important. Tesoriero (2006) stressed that people must integrate and respect the differences such as values, attitudes, culture, ethnicity, social practices, political beliefs, sexuality and religion. People have created different meaning to their surroundings brought about by individual attitudes and perspectives.

Today, universities and social entities in the Philippines are providing different programs for students to give opportunities of studying and working abroad. Likewise, many of the constituents from neighboring countries come over to study. Thus, it has already become a common scene to see foreign students inside Philippine universities taking up courses from medicine, to dentistry, to physical therapy, etc. They interact with Filipino teachers and fellow college classmates everyday as they engulf themselves with the culture and the educational system. They are mixtures of Asians, to black Americans and Middle Eastern students hoping to earn a degree after four to five years. This is part of the ASEAN integration of fostering student and staff exchange and encouraging joint research projects. Common

credit transfer systems and other enabling mechanisms are established to work and create a common space for higher education.

Harmonization of higher education is essentially a process that recognizes the significance of regional education cooperation and the importance of establishing an 'area of knowledge' in which activities and interactions in higher education, mobility, and employment opportunities can be easily facilitated and increased. It is the process that acknowledges diversity of higher education systems and cultures within the region, while simultaneously seeking to create a 'common educational space'.

The logic behind sending students for overseas experience, according to Roy (2006) is providing them with a short term international experience during which they can develop required skills that will probably guide them in the global business world of today's economies. Global graduates are often products of study abroad program which includes the development of intercultural competence. Now a days, internationalization programs are measured by the number of foreign students and academic staff in a university. Concurring to study of Bridges et al. (2009), this situation has been detrimental of exploring the pedagogical aspects of intercultural learning and improving the educational quality of international experience.

As students' mobility in the higher education is heightened, it is expected that there is crossing over cultural borders. Thus, it is fitting to know if the rudimentary of intercultural communications has been observed in the status of foreign students in the Philippines. Language teachers must incorporate the significance of the dimensions of intercultural communication.

Many people believe that learning the native language is the first step for successful endeavors in a multicultural context; not realizing the knowledge of language alone can never guarantee success in an international environment where the presence of different culture is felt.

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As espoused by Liddicoat (2008) language denotes culture and culture is realized through language. People understand the intangible values and belief systems including perspectives and thoughts using language. These frame the culture shared by a community. Language cannot be separated from the cultural frame of reference in which communication takes place. Thus, communicators should also know the silent language of communication such as colors, distance, perception, mimics, gestures and even kinetics. (Daniels et al, 2004).

When cultures are communicating, it is not expected that receiver is subject to the same social values and cultural variable with the sender (Beamer, 1992). As the global village continues to shrink and cultures collide, it is essential for people to become more sensitive, more aware and more observant to the myriad motions, gestures, and body language that surround as people continue to communicate and interact.

When greeting somebody for example, handshaking differences can make for some embarrassing and humorous cultural encounters. British, Australian, New Zealander, German and American will usually shake hands on meeting and again on departure; while Asian and Arabic culture may continue to hold hands even when the handshake has ended. On the other hand, Japanese consider bodily contact to be impolite. Japanese people bow on the first meeting; the person with the highest status bowing the least and the one with the least status bowing the most.

The Japanese way of listening to someone likewise, involves a repertoire of smiley nods and polite noise, which have no direct equivalent in other languages. The idea is to encourage the speaker to keep on talking but this often misinterpreted by Westerners and Europeans as agreement. The head nod is an almost universal sign for 'yes' except for the Bulgarians who use the gesture to signify 'no'.

Additionally, Europeans and Westerners blow their noses into a handkerchief or tissue while Asians and Japanese spit or snort. Each is appalled by what they see as the other's disgusting behavior. Some cultures are comfortable by cheek kissing when greeting while others are rather conservative. Whether or not someone will be offended by being touched during conversation depends on his or her culture. For example, the French and Italians love to continually touch as they talk, while the British prefer not to touch at any time unless its on a sports field in front of a large audience. Asians are fine with touch too except for the Japanese people (Dubose, 2017).

For effective communication to happen, one must be able to develop in them the competence, the value and importance of intercultural communication especially in this globalized era. Sociolinguistics dictates that effective exchange of ideas entails not just the effective use of language but also the inclusion of intercultural sensitivity.

According to Du Praw & Axner (1997), there are six fundamental patterns of cultural differences and these can all impact on service delivery and communication understanding. First, is the different verbal communication style. Across cultures, some words and phrases are used in

different ways. For example, 'yes' can vary from 'maybe I'll consider it' to 'definitely yes'. This can affect a worker's perception of the client's consent to a course of action. When they say 'yes' or tacitly agree to a worker's suggestion, it may not really mean that they do agree with the worker but rather that they do not want to offend the worker by disagreeing with them.

Second fundamental pattern is the different non-verbal communication styles. Non-verbal communication refers to facial expressions, gestures, seating arrangements, personal distance, and sense of time. For example, avoidance of eye contact is a sign of great respect in some cultures, including our Australian Indigenous cultures. Some Australians regard this as a sign of hiding something.

Third, are the different attitudes toward conflict. Some cultures view conflict as a positive thing, whilst others try to avoid it. For example, many Eastern countries deal with their conflict quietly. A written exchange might be the flavored means to resolve the conflict.

Next in the list are the different approaches to completing tasks. People from different cultures tend to complete tasks differently. Some may be task-orientated, whilst others are relationship-orientated. For example, Asian cultures tend to attach more value to developing relationships at the beginning of a shared project and more emphasis on task completion towards the end, as compared with Europeans. Conversely, Europeans tend to focus immediately on the task at hand and let relationships develop as they work on that task. The fact that one group chooses task over relationship does not mean that they place different values on relationships or that they are less committed, rather that they just pursue different goals during the process.

Another important pattern is the different decision-making styles. Decision-making roles vary widely from culture to culture. Some cultures delegate, while other cultures place higher value on holding decision-making responsibilities. When decisions are made in a group, some cultures may prefer majority rule, while others view consensus as the preferred mode for reaching a decision. Australian Aboriginal people reach decisions of importance to their clan only after discussing them with others in the clan, particularly elders.

Lastly, are the different attitudes toward disclosure. When you deal with a conflict, ensure that you are aware of how people may differ in expressing their emotions. Some questions that may need to be asked, such as 'What was the conflict about?' may seem intrusive and personal.

In fact, a body of research has suggested that communicative competence should be broadened to include the notion of intercultural competence (Bryam, 1997; Corzeet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999; Sercu 2006; Xu & Stevens, 2005; Wen, 2004). As Bryam (1997) proposes, intercultural competence requires not only the development of language proficiency as stated in communicated competence, but also emphasizes an equally important ability of intercultural exploring, understanding, interpreting and mediating.

In Lewis's 'When Culture Collides' (2005), he wrote about the importance of focusing the cultural roots of national behavior, both in society and business. When we have the knowledge of the basic traits of other cultures as well as our own, we will be able to minimize unpleasant surprises such as culture shock and will minimize unpleasant surprises. This will give us in insights in advance and enable us to interact successfully with the different nationalities.

A report by the Philippine Bureau of Immigration and UNESCO (2013) titled International Mobility of Foreign Students in Asia and the Pacific indicated that in 2010, 1791 foreign students were enrolled in the Philippines. Similarly, no studies were conducted in regards to their sojourning in the Philippines where several challenges on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) occur. With these influences and consequences of mixed cultures, environment and pedagogical challenges, their existence may be twisted and consequences of these factors may be irreversible, leading to problems with interaction and social adjustments. It is in this light that the researcher has deepened the desire to venture into the intercultural communicative experiences of foreign students enrolled in a university in Cebu, Philippines. The goal is to look into the phenomenon as to how they have cope with or if they have, in terms of cultural considerations when communicating with their Filipino professors, classmates and other Filipinos around them.

It is believed that this study will contribute to the understanding of the foreign students' social lived experiences and improvement of the internationalization programs of higher education in the universities in Cebu to consider intercultural communications and cultural sensitivity and understanding when communicating, teaching and dealing with foreign students. Further, understanding better the lived experiences of foreign students will also give a glimpse on how Filipino teachers have portrayed their roles and have adapted strategies in accommodating diverse learners.

Philosophical Stance

This study examines and implicitly acknowledges different philosophical assumptions in terms of (1) ontology, (2) epistemology, (3) axiology, (4) rhetoric, and (5) methodology.

Ontology

According to Creswell (2003), ontology is the claim, which researchers make regarding knowledge. To this end, the research scaffolding was designed with an ontological view that assumes the phenomenon being studied contributing to the best and effective way of handling foreign university students and improve the internationalization program of the universities.

Guba & Lincoln (1994) and Crotty's (1994) assert that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within essentially social context. Additionally, building on their personal perceptions, they have the capacity to respond to the social environment. It significantly affects their future actions and interactions.

Thus, the ontological assumptions would help to practically emphasize the lived experiences of foreign students in learning English as they mainstream themselves in the regular university life. Questions on experiencing and understanding are navigated in the study.

First Opening. Husserl's central insight was that consciousness was the condition of all human experience. He sought to explain how to overcome personal biases, which stand in the way of achieving the state of pure consciousness. An important tenet of Husserlian approach to science was the belief that the meaning of lived experiences may be unraveled only through one to one transactions between the researcher and the objects of research. These interactions must involve attentive listening, interaction and observation to create representation of reality more sophisticated than previous understandings. In the case of this study, prolonged engagement will be made between the researcher and the participants for deeper understanding and knowledge on their experiences in intercultural communications.

Epistemology

Constructivist epistemology asserts that knowledge is a product of the social context where meaning evolves from interactions with others as declared by Crotty (1997). According to Guba & Lincoln (1994), a study steeped in constructivism asserts the following contentions: the research-respondent relationship is subjective, interactive, and independent; reality is multiple, complex and not easily quantifiable; the value of the researcher, respondents, research site and underlying theory undergird all aspects of the research; and the research product is context specific.

In a more detailed explanation, a constructivist approach aspires to discover and describe the unique nature of those being investigated (Briodo & Manning, 2002). Further, the epistemological direction was fitting for this study and it will structurally reveal the voice of the foreign students as they fit in the situation and context of their learning zone. The intentionality of design helps to guide an interactive experience with emphasis placed on the evolving story to be told by them. There is no theoretical framework because the lived experiences are considered more important and its meaning can generate the theory. The intentionality reveals that all thinking is always about something and all doing is always doing something. The purpose is the end but the end can be a means to another end; the subject can also be the object and the object may be the subject of another object.

Axiology

Language functions as a cultural tool both in mother tongue and second or foreign language learning. Therefore, language learning should incorporate culture in a contextualized manner. Language denotes culture and culture is realized through language. It is through the use of language that people are able to approach and understand the intangible values, beliefs, perspectives and thoughts that frame the culture shared by a community. Language cannot be separated from the cultural frame of reference in which communication takes place.

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of foreign students enrolled in universities as they involve

themselves in intercultural communication. Language as a cultural tool, works as a major player in their interaction.

Bracketing, according to Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole (2004) is an investigator's attempt to achieve the state of transcendental subjectivity and neutrality by putting aside prior understanding of preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher has not had any experience of teaching foreign students in a regular setting. Thus, bracketing is easily accomplished. There are no preconceived notions about the experiences of the participants.

Facticity is a belief in factual characteristics of real objects. By bracketing our facticity, we transfer our focus from assumed things out there to our experience. This paper discusses the lived experiences of the foreign students in terms of intercultural communications. The daily interaction of foreign students and their take about it is the focus of this paper.

Phenomenological reduction is an attempt to suspend the observer's viewpoint and hearing another person's reality and focusing on the central, dominant or recurring themes which represent the essential qualities or meaning of that person's experience. It is central to Husserl's approach; moreover, it is associated with the idea of bracketing. The researcher uses bracketing since she does not have any encounter with foreign students for a long period of time; foreign students who are considered regular college students.

Rhetoric

Making sense of reality, describing and explaining human behavior is the focus of doing qualitative research (Barbour, 2008). In the same way, in-depth knowledge on the meaning of a particular aspect of experience is discovered and conveyed. Words and language are even viewed as the primary symbol system in arriving at the meaning of such experience especially that dialogues and reflections are reviewed.

Through the process of this phenomenological venture, the researcher strives for an accurate interpretation of the data, such that the study would measure what it mainly intends to measure. The findings are communicated in rich descriptions and the unique voice of the informants are at the core of this research process. To this effect, this study would allow future researchers to determine viability and applicable transferability of findings to other settings (Creswell, 1998).

Considering the side of human behavior that of connection and interaction, it simply implies that it is an interesting issue, which needs to be given attention. Hence, the researcher's fervent hope is to provide an accurate portrayal and analysis on their foreign students' experiences in intercultural communication and increasing competence.

Thematizing is formulating the purpose of the investigation and describing the concepts of the phenomenon, the lived experiences of the foreign students in their intercultural communications. Themes are used for the attributes, descriptors, elements and concepts from the gathered data. These contain codes that have a common point of reference and have high degree of generality that unifies ideas

regarding the phenomenon (Vaismoradi, et.al 2016). Coding as the process of data reduction is an element of data organization and this reduces the amount of raw data to that which is relevant to the research objectives. It breaks the data down to manageable sections and takes research through the transformation of raw data to higher-level insights or abstractions as the development of themes.

Domain of Inquiry

This study analyzes the lived experiences of foreign students, enrolled in regular courses in Southwestern University Cebu City, in their intercultural communications. Consequently, emergent themes are derived from the students' intercultural communicative experiences.

This research objective served as the starting point in stating the phenomena to be studied in a very general way (Creswell, 1998). The aim was that by using a broad research objective, the researcher would have the flexibility to explore the phenomena in an unconstrained manner as stressed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) before more focused details could be applied as the study progresses (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). Besides, Marshall and Rossman (2006) contended that qualitative approaches to inquiry are uniquely suited to uncovering the unexpected and exploring new avenues.

Additionally, the phrasing of questions was purposefully open-ended utilizing exploratory verbs and beginning with words such as "what" or "how." The terminology used for the question reflected the research intent and created a map for data collection (Creswell, 2007).

Research Design

Gaining support from the phenomenological tradition (Creswell, 2008), the study employed the descriptive Husserlian qualitative research design in gathering data. The main purpose was to explore the lived experiences of the foreign students in their intercultural communication, this being a phenomenological study. This endeavor documented and created a record regarding their experiences in intercultural communication. Besides, the involved informants' voice was considered the core of this investigation as their lived experiences had shed light on this phenomenon.

In addition, a qualitative strategy was chosen to help navigate the domain of inquiry. Hence, a declaration regarding how an investigator views knowledge strategically motivates the research and guides every aspect of the study from objective to conclusion (Broido & Manning, 2002; Charmaz, 2006; Crotty, 1998; Vogt, 2007).

The phenomenological qualitative design was basically centered on examining the depths of human experiences through the descriptions provided and shared by the participants. In addition, qualitative phenomenological research tries to determine how people build meaning or understanding about their life world's experiences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Neuman, 2006; Oakley, 2005; Polit & Beck, 2006).

This study makes use of Husserl's phenomenological method which according to Dy (2005) involves three steps namely; epoche, eidetic reduction, and phenomenological transcendental reduction.

The first step, *epoche*, is a way of looking at things wherein an individual sees only what is seen and those that can be described and defined. Accordingly, bracketing phase is another name of *epoche*. The said process is the same as to Descartes' Methodical Doubt (Husserl, 2012). Essentially, to bracket does not mean that the information is not true. It is only suspending the information until the full truth is revealed. Further, it is setting aside biases, presuppositions, daily insights, theories, belief habitual modes of thoughts, and judgments. They are bracketed in order to have a broad, clear and additional knowledge of a certain event. They are suspended for a greater exposition to follow. So to speak, this is part of the larger process of *epoche*.

The *eidetic reduction stage* is the process where the depth of experience is apprehended. It is derived from the Greek work "*eidōs*" which means "essence". After suspending the initial judgments, the researcher makes an inquiry about the deeper reality of the chosen field of study. This is the stage where experience plays a very significant role.

The last step, *phenomenological transcendental reduction*, involves the new perception of a phenomenon. In this process, reducing the object to the very activity itself of one's consciousness takes place. The importance of the subject, validating the experience is manifested. Interpretation and analysis happen. One way of doing it is through making a validation whether the initial judgments are true or not. This can be described as associating new meaning to the said event.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in Southwestern University (SWU) PHINMA located at Urgello St., Cebu City. SWU PHINMA was chosen primarily because of the presence of a lot of foreigners studying in the university. In the report of the University's Student Life Office, there are 39 nationalities enrolled in the different courses as of school year 2018-2019.

Southwestern University PHINMA is a leader in innovative undergraduate education, offering a life-enriching residential liberal arts and sciences experience for talented individuals who share a passion for intellectual exploration, engagement, and growth. Discovery and creation are intentionally fostered throughout a diverse and inclusive community of students, faculty, staff, and alumni, empowering all to advance research, scholarship, and the creative arts and lead fulfilling lives that contribute to the well-being of humanity (SWU-PHINMA, Student Life Office).

Southwestern University (SWU), officially the Southwestern University PHINMA, is a private university in Cebu City, Philippines founded in 1946 by two pharmacists husband-and-wife Matias Hipolito Chavez Aznar II and Anunciacion Barcenilla Aznar. It started as Southwestern Colleges in the summer of 1946 and became a university on December 11, 1959. The university has three campuses in Metro Cebu. It

has the following departments: elementary, high school, College of Arts and Sciences, Nursing, Education and Commerce, Law, Colleges of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy and the Graduate School Programs.

Southwestern University PHINMA is known to have a number of foreign students enrolled in the different programs offered by the university. The university's website showcases their foreign students in the different fields and courses.

Research Informants

The research informants were foreign students of Southwestern University. The point of saturation was reached on the 5th informant.

The 1st informant was a 19-year-old gentleman from India. He is taking up BS-Medicine and comes from a family of doctors.

He has been staying in a boarding school way back in India and has experienced being away from family most of the time.

The 2nd informant was from Nepal. He is 24 years old and is the current president for the International student Organization in the university. He is in his 3rd year as a Medicine student.

The 3rd informant is a male Pakistani student. He is in his 1st year taking up BS Medicine. He is 20 years old. He graduated top of his class way back in Pakistan.

The 4th informant is a 22-year-old Nigerian student. He is also taking up Medicine. He has never been to any country except Nigeria and the Philippines.

The 5th informant is a lady from Kenya. She is 22 years old and loves travelling, reading and dancing. Her native language is Kiswahili and she speaks English as her second language.

Inclusion Criteria

The informants were foreign students who were enrolled in a regular university program in SWU PHINMA and who considered English as a foreign and or second language. These are students who have been in the Philippines for at least 6 months. In Kachru's (1996) concentric circles, these are from nations considered to belong in his outer and expanding circle. The chosen participants were willing informants for the study; thus, this paper employed the criterion-based purposive sampling. These informants were also willing to participate in the study.

Research Instruments

In this descriptive phenomenological study, the researcher is the main instrument because the results lie in her interpretation. In achieving the objective of the inquiry, in-depth interview using a semi-structured format was used to extract the essential themes from the informants. This was deemed necessary because the semi-structured format supports the interviewing approach most commonly used in phenomenological studies.

The informants were asked open-ended questions in order to obtain further clarification and information (Fassinger in Alvarez, 2011). There were preliminary questions to set the tone and lead to the main inquiry, which are the lived intercultural communicative experiences of the informants. The interview schedule contains a set of preliminary, during and closing questions, which are all, open-ended. The general nature of the questions revolved around their stay in the Philippines, their interaction with their teachers, classmates and friends, the challenges in communication and interaction if any, their coping mechanisms if there are, and their overall experience as foreign students in the Philippines.

Focused group discussion (FGD) was also employed as Colazzi's step 7 of the data analysis dictated, in order to reinforce the most fruitful lines of inquiry and explored further other issues for clarification and confirmation. The scope of the FGD questions was more on their general experiences as foreign students in a multicultural context.

The sojourn of foreign students in a multicultural context

Sojourning is more than just journeying; it is about rethinking how and why one travels. It involves experiences that give the opportunity to encounter something new, something relevant. It is experiencing from explorations.

Sojourn is comparative to the temporary stay of the foreign students in the Philippines. They come and stay for years to finish their university course and then they go back to their home country to practice their degrees. In the whole process, they have gone through series of experiences that differ from one foreigner to the other. They make discoveries of things that may or may not be helpful to them. They have become who they are because of their encounters; which are all part of the process of sojourning.

Schools as an educative agency has its primordial role to mold students regardless of race, cultural beliefs and practices, size, political ideology and development status. School have important role in the development of the society because it is a social agency tasked to educate the members.

Higher education also participates in this noble purpose of accommodating the diverse learners both locally and internationally. Memoranda are signed to usher the influx of international students from India, Nepal, Thailand, Korea, and countries in Africa. In these encounters, student mobility and students' intercultural skills as well as their language competence are developed causing a relationship to form. Many researchers (Bridges et al, 2009; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001) have asserted that this relationship is positive and that an international workplace-learning placement of short-term mobility program can be a profound intercultural experience that provides a unique opportunity to develop intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence can actually be considered as a synonym of intercultural communication yet it has a stronger focus on competencies. Hammer et al (2003) defined intercultural competence as the ability to think and act in intercultural appropriate ways. Interculturally appropriate ways of behavior can be exemplified as follows: behaving

adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures (Meyer, 1991); being able to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication, namely cultural differences and unfamiliarity, intergroup dynamics, and the tension of conflicts that can accompany this process (Canale & Swain 1980); being able to transcend ethnocentrism, appreciate other cultures and generate appropriate behavior in one or more different cultures (Bennett, Bennett & Allen, 2003).

This study focused on the lived experiences of foreign students in their intercultural communicative experiences. These foreign students are currently enrolled as regular college students in Southwestern University- PHINMA and consider English as a second and or foreign language. The accounts of the lived experiences of these students are central to the inquiry. The inquiry or a certain phenomenon is the main idea, concept or process studied in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). The study on the intercultural communicative experiences of the foreign students demanded both an understanding of their experiences and their interaction as immersed in a multicultural context. Engaging in collecting of data is considered a significant preliminary step. Creswell (2012) pointed out that collecting data means identifying and selecting individuals for the study, with their consent to be interviewed. The whole process in general should be known for them to be candid and honest in sharing information.

As the encoded transcripts were reviewed, read and re-read, the researcher noted recurring words and statements from the informants. As such, these were clustered and the following themes emerged:

Theme 1: I LOVE IT HERE

The informants had various impressions and apprehensions on what life in the Philippines would be. One thing common though is that, everything in the country is cheaper compared to other countries: education, food, cost of living, etc. These can be summed up to be positive impressions. Their choice and decision of coming to the Philippines to study medicine are usually influenced by their parents who are mostly doctors in their home countries. It is like fulfilling the dreams of their parents and relatives to have a doctor or additional doctor in the family.

Most of the informants were prompted of positive dints from friends and relatives who were able to stay in the country, mostly as students. They were given the promise of quality education especially if they take medical courses such as Pharmacy, Physical Therapy or Medicine in Southwestern University in Cebu.

Once they have set foot on the country, they have felt the warmth and friendliness of the Filipinos; there is openness in communication and expression; and most of them did not find any difficulty in terms of communicating the essentials. There is the sense of excitement as a foreigner in the Philippines.

Throughout the data review, the first theme mirrored the following codes: accommodation, freedom, interest and excitement.

Accommodation

Essentially, when one feels welcome in a place, there is less tension and the fear of the unknown would diminish. In Southwestern University, the informants felt comfortable with their teachers and students around. Although there are differences in their language, they are still able to communicate.

The following utterances validated the scenario.

"There is no difficulty. I feel the welcome of everyone, teachers and students and staff. The only problem is the language. I can understand the Filipinos way of English; its like American but they cannot understand ours. We have British English." (RI 4, 61-63)

"When Filipinos spot a foreigner, they usually tend to like you. If you talk to them, they will talk to you and they are very warm and hospitable." (RI 3, 284-285)

"Our classmates are very accommodating. Like for example in our medicine class – When our professor says a joke in the dialect and everybody laughs, we ask our Filipino classmates to translate and they translate immediately. They wanted us to appreciate the joke as well." (RI 2, 54-56)

"The teachers are very friendly like I was shocked because in Kenya we are really scared of our teachers like if we see a teacher we ran but here we interact with the teachers. They're friendly and they really share their knowledge with us and I really had a great experience with all the teachers how nice, how friendly and how welcoming they are. Yeah, and accommodating also." (RI 5, 63-66)

"Actually, my teachers we're really friendly. Like we can relate to them in class, outside class, like we would even sometimes just keep the officers to ask something, they're always welcoming" "We don't have any gap." (RI 5, 121-123, 125)

Freedom

There was freedom of expression and there were no major difficulties encountered when communicating. The informants were open to express their thoughts, emotions and beliefs. In communicating in a multicultural context, the informants declared that they never felt scared even though they are in a foreign land. The way they communicate is natural. Moreover, it is advantageous on their part because the host country uses English language as a medium of communication especially when dealing and interacting with foreigners. In this context we are led to believe that English is the language of university students, faculty members and administration personnel if they are to succeed in a globalizing world that demands an international career (Wilkinson, 2004)

Subsequently, English has become the tertiary education language par excellence and plays a key role as a commodity of globalization (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013)

Research Informant 2 mentioned that although, they are open and free to express and share their thoughts and opinions, there are always limitations, especially in an foreign land. He acknowledged that as a foreigner, he has to be careful in expressing beliefs and religion and even with

sensitive issues like smell, fashion, color and looks concerning other nationalities in his class.

"There are no difficulties though, but just a bit of limitations"....."as far as cultural sensitivity, we do not really like the smell (referring to Indians and Africans) but we have hesitations in telling them." (RI 2, 39, 63-65)

"You know, Filipinos love to socialize and so I was like, that's good. She asked me first like that, he asks me first. Like what is this and that's good, then we interact. Now, I'm interacting with them a lot. I'm teasing them, I'm like if I remember their names I talk to them a lot even if I'm like my family let go. I'm not let them go. Like I talk to them joking. I don't have difficulties." (RI, L 136-141)

In terms of freedom of expression, informant 3 recalled his own encounter of an incident he witnessed which is a clear indication of the foreigners freedom of expression of practices and beliefs.

"Some Africans have a way of celebrating birthdays. For example, they beat the celebrant. I saw a lady African student was beaten up badly. She was kicked, slapped and pushed by other Africans. When I came nearer to try to rescue, they told me that it was their way of celebrating birthdays. The more bruises the birthday celebrator had, the better and the longer she would live." (RI 2, 40-43)

These Africans felt the freedom to express their own cultural beliefs and tradition even in a foreign land like the Philippines. Freedom of expression is enshrined in global and regional human rights conventions, and is protected in the constitution and other legislation of most countries. Freedom of expression is not limited to what is said or published in traditional mass media such as newspapers, radio and television. It also applies to the arts and to views that are shared on the Internet, as well as on social media. Nor does freedom of expression apply only to information and ideas that are popular or uncontroversial, but also to those that may be perceived as controversial, shocking or offensive. Those who express criticism of power may have a particular need for protection.

Additionally, their English classes during their pre med courses have encouraged them to communicate freely and express both in writing and in oral. Most of the informants' Filipino teachers of English have contributed much to their confidence in expressing and communicating freely.

The following utterances validated the codes.

" My English teacher during the pre med was the coolest teacher I have had." " he was very open to students taking their time in speaking of what they want to speak about." (RI 3, 88, 98)

"My Filipino teacher of English has lots of ideas.".....he is very creative."the activities he give pull out our confidence, we are free to talk." (RI 1, 32, 56-58)

Research Informant 2, shared that his English teacher was very creative in making them talk in class. Since the subject was Conversational English, they were asked to speak in front about a certain topic. The informant find this rather an exciting activity and at the same time helpful in developing

his communication skills. Informant 1 concluded that Filipino teachers are not just creative, they are also very clear with their instructions on what to do and how to do things.

All the informants mentioned that in their endeavors as foreign students in the university, they were accommodated well. There is adjustments in the way people communicate.

This is well explained in the theory of Communication Accommodation by Howard Giles (1971). Communication accommodation theory elaborates the human tendency to adjust their behavior while interacting. The reason behind this behavior is explained as to control the social differences between the interactants. People accommodate their communication activities to get approval and to set a positive image in front of the interactant. The environment in which they are interacting also affects the communication behavior. This theory concerns the behavioral changes that people make to attune their communication to their partner, and the extent to which people perceive their partner as appropriately attuning to them. Moreover it is concerned with the links between language, context, and identity.

In the case of the foreign students, they undergo a process of adjustments to the kind of English spoken in the University. They mentioned that some words uttered by their fellow students or classmates are mispronounced or have different accent from theirs. Nevertheless, they adjust and accommodate. They also acknowledge that the people around them adjust and accommodate as well to the kind of English they have, which is more on British.

"It was quite interesting because we understand English, but they're not committed to them, its quite hard for them, we adjust to their American English." (RI 4, 49-50)

"I just choose to adjust. Uh just listen keenly and I guess if you choose to decide, to adapt, then you will." (RI 5, 75).

"Like, uh the English teacher was very good. He has accent. Which we can understand, but some of the teacher we have to take our time to understand their accent. We have different accents." (RI 1, 61-62)

Sense of Interest and Excitement

Many Filipinos show interest in foreigners. They ask about their culture and how they do things. The informants narrated that since they arrived in the country, they have also felt a special kind of treatment, being foreigners. The teachers were considerate of the concerns of the foreign students.

"I feel like some foreigners abuse the special treatment because if we do not attend class, our professors are considerate because we might have some issues and concerns on visa, embassy appearance, etc. If our Filipino classmate will be absent, there is no excuse, the professors are a bit harsh." (RI 2, 186-189)

"I think the university makes us feel special because we pay double or really more than the regular tuition fee." (RI 1 362-363)

In the transcripts collected, the foreigners feel that Filipinos are very interested in them. The following utterances show this concept.

"They ask a lot . I answer a lot. They ask me if is it like that, is it not like that. How is it like we can marry here or not. I answer a lot.asking a lot is a sign of you know, intelligence, curiosity." (RI 1, 81, 84-85)

"I think the teachers feel excited to be with us too, foreigners in the class." (RI 2, 18)

"They love to know." (RI1, 127)

"The teachers feel so excited to be with us." (RI 2, 18)

"I was really excited I couldn't wait to get here actually. I google a lot about Philippines, and I got to interact with missionaries from the Philippines so I knew they're nice people, so I didn't feel like I was scared, I was just yearning to come here." (RI 5, 19-21)

Research informant 4 mentioned that Filipinos kept on asking about how Africans braid their hair and in one occasion, even requested for a demonstration. The informants find this rather normal, since they believe Filipinos are fond of foreigners. In the neighborhood or dormitory, their Filipino neighbors especially the kids are very curious and interested to be with foreigners.

Informant 5 shared that students asked her how she transported herself from Africa to the Philippines, as if thinking about how backward Africa is. She jokingly mentioned that she rode on lions just to satisfy the inquiries. They feel happy knowing that others are interested in them; although there are moments when they feel it is way too much and would lead to irritation.

Being in a foreign land also posts excitement on their part. They can tour around the country and they find the Philippines very beautiful. They are free to explore, no parents and guardians with them and the best part is that they find everything cheaper than usual.

Theme 2: I ADJUST TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Given some difficulties encountered, the informants reported that one important mechanism of survival in a foreign land is adjustments to cultural differences. Primarily, being in a foreign land requires a great deal of understanding, respect and acceptance. All elements lead to adjustments.

Through out the data review in the study, the second theme mirrored the code on understanding others. Intercultural communication concentrates on interpersonal communication of people from different cultural backgrounds. It considers avenues to understand and settle disagreements and struggles and produce possible solutions for arising issues. The concern is on the face-to-face interaction of individuals and groups with different views and communicative behavior (Bennett, 1998; Stepanoviene 2011).

An important issue in honing the skill on intercultural sensitivity is developing tolerance with differences on culture. Lindsey (2005) presented findings in his study,

stating “study abroad” offers a unique opportunity for students to confront both differences and similarities in many aspects of culture and values as well as develop specific skills in multicultural competence

In developing positive attitudes that will benefit intercultural communication, one must consider the level of respect for cultural differences in any intercultural communicative endeavors (Mendoza, 2016).

Understanding Others

Chen and Starosta (2000) conceptualize the emotional component of intercultural communication as intercultural sensitivity. This dimension is focused on personal emotions or changes in feelings caused by culturally diverse situation, people or environments. The components of intercultural sensitivity would be trust, implication, attention and the capacity to enjoy intercultural interaction.

Common to all informants is the revelation of having difficulty in understanding the kind of English the Filipinos have. Maldona (2009) said that some aspects of communication could vary according to geographical areas, social class, gender, age and level of education.

In communicating with fellow students, they explained that they needed to have a great deal of patience in listening and trying to decipher what is being said. The difficulty lies more on the American accent and the kind of English, which is used in the Philippines unlike theirs, which is British English.

“ I like the English teacher; he was very good. He has accent, which we can understand, but some teachers and students, we have to take our time to understand their accent. We have different accents.” (RI 1, 61-62)

“I just choose to adjust. Uh just listen keenly and I guess if you choose to do something, like choose to decide to adapt, then you will.” (RI 5, 75)

“Actually It really bother me and I really find it interesting like an awesome experience to at least I've known people whom I've never had, I feel It's a great platform.” (RI 5, 209-210)

Wang and Hannes (2014) stressed that all students who embark on an education journey in a country other than that of their origin are expected to adjust to the new environment. Struggle and challenges are evident as they need to find mechanisms to cope with. Foreign student's juggles with the need to adapt with different issues including academic life and stress brought about by acculturation as sojourners.

Accommodation or adjustments in people's communication in verbal and nonverbal styles are done through two ways: divergence and convergence. Divergence is used to highlight group identity through complimenting the differences of the group they identify with. Groups with strong ethnic or racial pride often use divergence. Convergence on the other hand is used more often by weak individuals for social approval

and aims on matching the communication styles of the person with whom they are speaking to.

If a person has ever found himself matching the vocabulary, speed and tempo of the person he is talking to, and then he has experienced firsthand illustrations of Communication Accommodation Theory. The ability to communicate requires the individual to ‘successfully negotiate the mutually acceptable identities in interaction (Wisemen & J. Koester, 2002).

“I can understand Filipinos way of talking and speaker but the thing is they cannot understand ours.” (RI 4 245-246)

“It's like they speak different in pronunciation; like American English but our is British.” (RI 4, 248-249)

Aside from differences in language and accents, the informants observed that some foreigners have a certain kind of smell. Informant 2 noted that they these undesirable smell is perhaps caused by their food or hygiene. As a foreigner in a multicultural context he realized that it was difficult to tell them about these sensitive concerns for fear of misinterpretations that may lead others to feel inferior and discriminated.

The notion of cultural sensitivity has received a lot of attention in the fields of intercultural education (Anderson, et al, 2006). It has been defined as ‘the ability to be sensitive to cues that are often subtle or unfamiliar and to adjust behavior and expectations accordingly (Bennett, 2010; Stone, 2006). In the case of informant 2, he was able to control himself and tried to behave in a manner embracing sensitivity. Thus, intercultural sensitivity is claimed to be the crucial factor that enables people to live and work with people from different cultural backgrounds. Bennett (1993) claims that intercultural sensitivity is not an inherent trait but it develops through experience and the core of its development is acquiring the ability to understand and experience cultural differences in a more complex way (Hammer, et al., 2003). Cultural sensitivity demands for adjustment, understanding and acceptance. In the utterances of the informants, they emphasized the reason why they tolerate and accept such reality.

“There is a lot of diversity, there are African students, but them Africa there are different countries, which they represent. And of course each country in Africa are not the same. So just to say that Africans are like that, it is actually offensive to Africans like here.” (RI 3, 150-152)

“People will ask me like I'm from Nigeria but they don't know there are like 52 countries but I will just tell them on Africa there are 52 countries. And am not from Nigeria. Ah okay.” (RI 5, 109-111)

“When a person's English is broken or wrong, I don't really like kind of shaming people, so as long as I can get what you say, you don't have to say that you have to say this. I think that would really kill someone's confidence and it would just kill someone's confidence if you say no don't speak like that, don't do it like that.” (RI 5, 304-306)

There were recounts on challenges and problems with food and weather and how they have learned to cope with the situation.

"One of the main difference is the food"....I find the food here in the Philippines so spice less, it is tasteless for me, I'm sorry." (RI 1, 310, 315)

"When I first came to Cebu, I said to myself, oh no, the food is a problem. Filipinos are more on pork. But now, I learned to adjust and I eat anything. I love the food now." (RI 2, 78-79)

"The weather here is kinda hot. It is really hot. But there is nothing I can do, at least there is aircon in the classroom." (RI 5, 52-53)

"There is respect and people learn to adjust and understand." (RI 2, 167)

In understanding intercultural communication in the experience of the informants, the use of Kinesics is in communication is seen. Kinesics is the combination of gestures, posture, and body movements, regarded as a form of non-verbal communication. Ekman and Friesen (1969) identified five types of gesture: emblems or direct replacement for words, illustrators, shaping what is being said, affect displays, shows of emotion, regulators, for controlling the flow of conversation and adaptors, self-oriented tension relievers and other forms. Gestures and facial expressions were all very helpful in their communication; most especially when the words are difficult to understand. Research Informant reported:

"Gestures, eye contact, these are helpful. Yes, definitely using gestures among our classmates are very important because it can help understand something or a message." (RI 2, 87- 93)

Informant 4 narrated that at the beginning, he had difficulty understanding the gestures of the Indians. He was confused because their gesture is different from the general populace.

"Few gestures are the same or different. Just like the Indians. They do this (nodding his head) and say NO. Then, they say YES (turning his head from left to right)." (RI 4, 153-154)

After this observation and validation of this particular practice concerning gestures among Indians, Informant 4 shared that he gained understanding of the nature of Indians in this particular aspect and concluded that indeed, there are differences among people.

Proxemics, which is another criteria in the category of non-verbal communication, was also noted. Proximity is communicated, for instance, through the use of space, distance, touching, and body position (Lee, 2006). The use of space, the physical distance between people and the options for touch are closely related and culture specific. In their narratives, informant 2 mentioned that during his first 6 months of stay in the university, he noted that students of the same nationality gather and stay together and it was difficult to get into their circle.

Informant 3 stressed that many of his classmates thought he was an Indian, which he didn't like. He recounted the historical background between India and Pakistan and the war that divided the two nations. This historical background, in a way, has affected his notion of disliking being mistaken as an Indian. He never stayed near Indians and he was always away from them.

Alexandru (2012) in her discussion of the context of intercultural communicative competence points out the importance of identity in the process of intercultural learning, she asserts that:

Any subject defines himself through individual identity. It represents a set of individually selected values generally accepted by the human group. The individual manifests his identity and tests the unitary strategies by interacting with other individuals in the group he belongs to or outside it. Thus, he obtains the coordinates of his similarity to others and those of his difference towards others.

One activity that helped the foreign students adjust to cultural differences is their International Students' Day. It is an annual celebration of culture, where different nationalities wear their country costume, they cook their food and let other taste and showcase their dances and other traditions. This helped a lot in adjustments and understanding of other cultures. They collaborated and learned together in spite of their differences.

"It is a celebration of culture. Because of this activity, we learn different aspects of each culture, each nationality here in school." (RI 1, 100-101)

"We always look forward to this event every year."...."we get to taste others food, see dances, see different traditions and handicrafts"....."we get to communicate and learn together the other cultures." (RI 2, 32, 35-37)

The informants likewise revealed that they were able to learn to adapt and adjust as they were immerse in different working teams in the classroom. Their English teachers have given them a number of group activities that helped them understand and tolerate others. This is showcased in the study of Senemoglu (2012). He concluded that collaborative learning improves the interaction of students from different cultures, and helps them have tolerance, empathy and contributes to living in a democratic life style.

Informants were motivated to adjust because of the knowledge gained from their encounters with the different nationalities. Motivation and knowledge can inform us as we gain new experiences, but how people feel in the moments of intercultural encounters is also important. Tolerance of uncertainty refers to an individual's attitude about and level of comfort in uncertain situations (Martin & Nakayama, 2010)

Successful outcomes are achieved when individuals have a high level of tolerance for uncertainty. These can be measured if one exhibits more patience especially when seeking for information (Pusch, 2009).

Additionally, Anderson and Rexeisen (2006) found that students who submit themselves to a short term, non-language based study abroad program have developed better acceptance and ways on adapting to differences. Thus, improved cultural sensitivity.

Part of understanding others in the context of intercultural communication, is the concept of metalanguage. Sinclair (1986) defines metalanguage knowledge as information resulting from making language the object of reflection, which may focus separately on form and meaning and on the relationship between the two aspects. This process leads to categorized knowledge about the language, which enables one to perform tasks parallel or peripheral to communication, where communication is understood as comprehension and production of utterances.

Karmiloff-Smith's (1986) model of metalinguistic development is based on a recurrent 3 phase model of progressive representational explication of different levels of processing. The first stage begins with initially implicitly defined representations which are redescribed as subsequently more and more explicit levels, culminating in knowledge available to conscious access and verbalization. In her view, metalinguistic awareness has almost no role to play in the diachronic dimension of language acquisition, it has a minor role in the use of language (on line processing in real time), but it has an important role in overall cognitive development.

Theme 3: I AM NEVER THE SAME PERSON

Being in a foreign land teaches one to be independent, responsible and grateful. Throughout the data review in this study, the third theme mirrored the codes on Becoming a Better Person and gaining a Wider Perspective.

Becoming a Better Person. Most of the informants believed that their experiences in a foreign land have led them to becoming a better version of themselves. First of all, they are out of their comfort zones, which mean they have to stand on their own without family and relatives around. The informants declared that back in their home country, they had almost everything, in contrast with their stay in the Philippines where they have a lot of things to consider and take care of, like dormitory, food, visa, safety and security, health, schedules. All these concerns led them to being a mess at the beginning. But after 6 months to a year of adjustments and adaptation of the current situation, they realized and even felt grateful for the whole experience. Staying in the Philippines has made them a better person, more responsible and more mature. The utterances below are evidences of these scenarios (See Appendix G).

"I am very different person from what I was 5 years back".... Being a foreigner, I am out of the comfort zone." (RI 2, 97)

"I am so good in grammar but still I can connect with them (other people). I think I am good in grammar right now...." See, I learn, I don't know what to use and what I just speak and speak and speak. I learn my English in here. If I didn't come in here, I cant speak English because in India we have to use our own language. If I speak in English they'll be like,

oh you're freak man, why do you speak English." (RI 1, 330, 333-337)

"For the first 5 months, I was immensely depressed. I was homesick and I loss around 20kg within a month".....but when I surrounded myself with a lot of people, communicated with them and forced myself to live with multiple roommates so I can interact and talk. It helps a lot and I became better, a totally different person." (RI 3, 178-179, 186-190)

"My life changed when I get to know more cultures, more people and more personalities. I am transformed." (RI 4, 208)

Central to the development of intercultural communication competency is experiential learning (Jacobson, 1996). Experience is the essence of this pedagogy because it involves the learner to be in the situation therefore having significance to the whole person (Schunk, 2012).

The experience of studying in a foreign country is very helpful in understanding others and becoming sensitive with other's culture. Learners are converted because of their actions and they way they relate to the world (Driscoll, 2005).

Wider Perspective

Being exposed to different nationalities, gives one a wider perspective on things. Research Informant 2 recounted how he has developed love for other cultures. During their International Students' Day, they get to appreciate food, fashion, dance and practices of other nationalities. It was during this time that he valued more the presence of different nationalities and international students. It gave him a wider perspective on how vast the world can be.

Dwyer (2004) pointed out that programs concerned with foreigners like a study abroad set up have definite impact on the learners' intercultural sensitivity and personal development which includes their competence and proficiency in language and academic success.

Worthy to note, that with the presence of differences, informants acknowledged the fundamental idea that humans are still the same. The following utterances are noted to speak on this sub theme:

"Inspite of all the differences, I learned that we are all the same. The only difference among people is food and the language, other than that, I think we are all just the same." (RI 4, 264-268)

"The fundamental thing is that you learn how to respect them even if you disagree with them".....at the end of the day you will realize I can because even if we are from different places growing in our own counties there is a certain set of norms that are socially acceptable and you just go along with that because it's the way it is." (RI 3, 216-222)

"All of us have to make decisions, whether you're not going to focus on the differences or the similarities and whatever our decision is, if were going to focus on the differences, we

are going to be an extremist person. That's just the way it is. And we are going to focus on the similarities despite the difference, we're gonna respect disagreements I think we built character as a person individually. And we learn to live in this world and it helps a person deeply." (RI 3, 229-233)

"I won't say its easy but its great at the end of the day even though you have to really struggle and try to accommodate people and its really awesome to learn other cultures and to complete it in my system and at least I don't say no to other cultures but its great that people would learn stuff about other cultures because sometimes we just assume things like we see on TV or something, but when you meet people and you get to learn their culture faster and its really great, really awesome. You will become a better person." (RI 5, 293-297)

"Actually It really bother me and I really find it interesting like an awesome experience to atleast I've known people whom I've never had, I feel It's a great platform." (RI 5, 209-211)

To foster attitudes that motivate people immerse in multicultural context, there must be a development of a sense of wonder about culture. This sense of wonder can lead to feeling overwhelmed, humbled or awed (Opdal, 2001).

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