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The Diaspora of Nations: The Culture Journey of Foreign Students in Philippine School Doha

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ABSTRACT

Background. The present study discusses the adaptation skills of foreign students in Philippine School Doha. Its focus is to shed light to the lived experiences of full-blooded foreign students who are enrolled in a school that mainly caters to the Filipino community in Qatar. **Method.** A phenomenological research design was utilized to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of the non-Filipino students, focusing on the central question: “How do foreign students perceive the culture of Filipino Students in PSD?” A semi-structured interview was conducted to gather data. The data gathered were analyzed using an inductive approach in theme development. **Findings:** The findings extrapolate the degree of influence the Filipino culture has on these foreign students. It underscores four themes from the respondents’ verbalization of their experiences which serve as signposts in their journey namely: Immersion which includes observations and discoveries; Alienation which comprises estrangement and conflict; Pliancy which includes conformity and deviance; and finally, Acculturation which highlights adaptation and convergence. **Conclusion.** The Filipino culture is permeating. It has enriched the lives of the non-Filipino students and has made them appreciate and lived the Filipino way of life. Hence, these students showcase different adaptation skills in order to make sense of the foreign culture they are immersed in. **Recommendation.** The paper suggests that future researchers consider a more diverse selection of nationalities to elicit a much wider verbalization of their lived experiences.

Key Words: *Acculturation, Adaptation, Alienation, Deviance, Conformity, Immersion, Pliancy*

INTRODUCTION

Our modern world proves increasingly global in character, with international relations, cooperation and exchange commonplace. (Sinclair, 2019) This advent of globalization has paved the way for nations, which were once separated by concrete boundaries, to fuse and affect each other. It brings together people of different cultures, (Winaya, et. al., 2019) and has made cultural exchange and interaction more plausible than ever. It is a process of diffusion and convergence (Wimmer, 2001: Wojtczak & Venter, 2020) where practices and ideas have led to exponential growth in global linkages and the development of a global consciousness, which in turn led to the reorganization of social life on a global scale (Fu & Chiu, 2007: Wojtczak & Venter, 2020). Undeniably, this unification of ways of life is not something to fret about, but a growing recognition that people interpret reality

differently.

Being and becoming human in time and space requires specificity. (De Mesa, 2003) This specificity accounts for the diversity of the way people live. In fact, diversity and plurality are two basic and unchangeable characteristics of life. Humans exist but this existence is marred by different worldviews, beliefs, practices, rituals and interpretations of reality. There is really no one general way of living life. Hence diversity presupposes a diversity of a world feel, a diversity of culture. "Through such a specific way of feeling, thinking and behaving, people participate in life; through culture, people live life." (De Mesa, 2003)

Admittedly, every person looks at reality from his/her point of view. The discovery of plurality of culture and the acknowledgement of cultural diversity brings with it an awareness that each cultural group strongly tends to view reality in its own way (De Mesa, 2003). When we look at life's realities, we are confronted with culturally defined realities. This means that our experiences are cultural experiences." (De Mesa, 2005) No culture, therefore, should claim superiority for the way others lived their lives may just be as good and valid as one's own. Something beneficial can be always be learned from looking at life from others' own fence.

In a way, cultural diversity has become crucial in today's world. This increasing plurality of contexts should now be seen as an existential reality; the norm and no longer the exception. Whether people work or study or even stay at home, the chances of interacting with people from various races, ethnic groups and cultures is far greater now than it has been ever before. By learning about people of different cultural backgrounds, one can increase horizons, have better interpersonal dialogue, and communicate more on a personal level (Asim, 2017).

The heterogeneous character of the society should not be the reason for conflicts and disagreement, but an avenue for peaceful co-existence. For people to stay in harmony concerning each other's culture, however, there must be crucial practices that make such harmonious living possible (Winaya et. al., 2019). This is where acculturation comes into the play; the ability to adapt to foreign influences without losing one's own identity.

Acculturation is the process of change in cultural identities, values, behaviors, and attitudes through contact with foreign cultures. The aim of the acculturation process is for diverse groups to live harmoniously with each other (Arizona et al., 2016; Winaya et al., 2019). While interaction with foreign culture is all but inevitable, it need not be the cause of schism and oppression. This is the reason why one must adapt while retaining what is indigenous and native.

As cultures enrich each other, it becomes foreseeable that more than one cultural identity exists in a person. Hence, cultural fusion and exchange happens when the individual retains his/her own native culture, while adapting to the foreign culture they are exposed to. Healthy acculturation is evidenced in making new friends in the host environment and engaging with the host culture (Güzel, 2019). And the adaptation skills employed will show whether the foreigner acculturating another culture is able to make sense of a new cultural context; to maintain the relationship he/she has with the local culture while exploring the possibilities of the foreign culture.

When internationals enter a new culture, they could experience uncertainty about the culture, which could create anxiety (Guzel, 2019). This immersion to a foreign culture is actually quite scary and alarming. This is the reason why understanding the process of acculturation these foreign students undergo through becomes all but necessary. Without understanding where they are coming from and devoid of any proper adaptation skill, these foreign students will certainly be lost in the cultural labyrinth.

The phenomenon of cultural exchange and influence particularly happens in Philippine School Doha, abbreviated as PSD. This school, as a home away from home, has become the centerpiece of the Filipino community in Qatar. While its main stakeholders are Filipinos, there are a few non-Filipinos who decided to enroll in the said school. Since its inception, it has continuously provided not only quality education, but exposure to the Filipino way of life to Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike.

The study focuses on the lived experiences of foreign students who are enrolled in Philippine School Doha. It utilizes a qualitative phenomenological design to understand how these foreign students are able to adjust to the Filipino culture. Its main objective is to illustrate and explore the adaptation skills they employ to make sense of the Filipino ideas and practices they are immersed in. The aim is to be their sojourners; to accompany them in their cultural journey as they try to accommodate the Filipino culture and to give themselves a chance to see reality from the Filipino perspective.

Incontestably, the Filipino culture is alive and thriving in PSD. It has become a cultural marker in this aforementioned school where Filipino values are cherished and practices are upheld. This culture has and will continue to affect the school's students explicitly and implicitly. In the process, foreign students become more Filipino; imbibing Filipino values not only for the sake of conformity, but as an offshoot of a deep love and appreciation for what is Filipino. At the end of the day, they have retained who they were, but they have been enriched. The marriage between their own native culture and the Filipino culture has been forged. Cultural fusion is achieved; not because there was one culture to start with, but because there was unity amidst diversity. Differences

were reconciled and a way of life that is unique yet contextual has been formed.

METHOD

The method of gathering the required data was accomplished through interviews. Questions that relate to the central question were asked and later analyzed to produce the recurring themes and the aforementioned simulacrum.

Data gathering procedure started by conceptualizing the developmental questions that relate to the central question, "How do foreign students perceive the culture of Filipino students in PSD?" The formulated questionnaire was then scrutinized and validated by teachers. Respondents were then selected following the criteria set. A letter was sent to the respondents to ask them to be a part of the study. Upon approval, the date and time for the interview were arranged. The interview was transcribed by hand and other pertinent data were recorded using a mobile phone. To ensure confidentiality, the respondents' name were excluded. Hence, they are just referred to as R1, R2, and so on.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study consists of a phenomenological design. This type of design attempts to broaden our understanding of the complex phenomena involved in learning, behavior, and communication that are germane to our field. (Neuabauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The focus of this study is the lived experience of the non-Filipino students in PSD. The aim is to determine the recurring themes that stem from the semi-structured interview.

RESEARCH LOCUS AND SAMPLE



The study was done in Philippine School Doha, a well-known learning institution in Doha, Qatar. The selection of the respondents followed the criteria set by the researchers namely: (1)

Respondent must be full-blooded foreigner; (2) must have stayed in PSD for at least a year; (3) must be Junior High School level and above, and (4) is eager to share his/her experiences relating to the Filipino culture.

Figure 1 Location Map of Qatar taken from cc Google Images

DATA COLLECTION AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The researchers were able to conduct the study by performing a semi-structured interview in terms of gathering information with the use of robotfoto. (University of Illinois, n.d.) not only as a part of the research protocol, but also to have accurate responses from the participants in terms of their lived experiences relating to the Filipino culture. The collected data and responses were transcribed and the researchers made sure that the responses will remain confidential.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researchers utilized the IMRaD format and used this step-by-step process to analyze the gathered data namely: (1) Rewinding and listening to the recorded interview of the interviewees; (2) Transcribing the interviewees' emic responses which is the insider's view of reality; (3) Retyping and editing the responses to transform the emic responses to etic which reveals how the researchers interpreted the collected data; (4) clustering the ideas and making a visual representation known as a Dendrogram to show the similarities and differences of the responses; (5) Then constructing a simulacrum to present the main themes and their relevant sub themes.

RESULTS

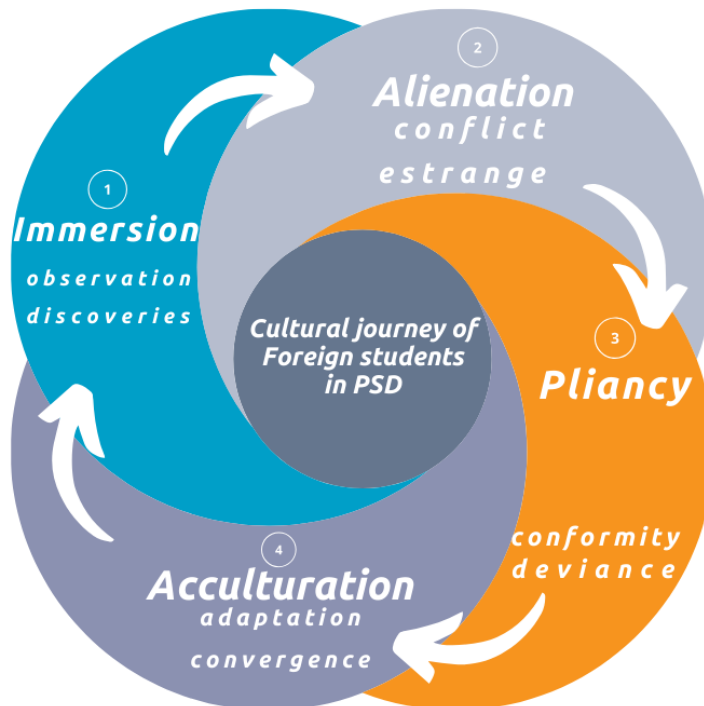


Figure 2. Cultural Journey of Students

The research simulacrum highlights the four stages that foreign students in PSD undergo through in their journey towards cultural adaptation. As they progress from one stage to another, a greater appreciation for the Filipino culture follows. It is cyclical which emphasizes that the process is never-ending as long as they maintain a close and intimate relationship with Filipino nationals. Although the journey starts with immersion, the constant and long exposure to the Filipino culture makes the stages recurring and permeating.

Qatar is one of the countries in the Middle East with the greatest number of expatriates. Hapal (2017) mentions that Filipinos comprise the fourth largest foreign group in Qatar with over two hundred thousand migrant workers and families. Indian nationals top the group while Nepalis come in close second. Year in and year out, thousands of hopeful Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike flock this country with the hope of a better life. With the lucrative employment package, it offers to professional and skilled workers, it is no surprise that people from all around the world have congregated in this small, yet progressive country.

Aside from the free accommodation and high salary given, many of these expatriates were able to bring their families in the country. Indeed, there is no better feeling than to enjoy the greener pasture of Qatar with one's family around. With the multiplicity of culture, Qatar becomes a melting pot of diverse cultures. The pluralistic characteristic that this country possesses comes in recognition with the increasing array of contexts each nationality brings into the table.

The increasing number of Filipinos expats in Qatar has led to the establishment of Philippine School Doha. Its educational system is based on the private school system (PSD MNP, 1, 2001). As stated in the Articles of Incorporation (1999), it continues to accommodate students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. It offers a complete curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education and

acknowledged by the Supreme Education Council, Qatar to unite Filipino families which are separated due to the lack of appropriate and affordable educational institution for their children in this country (SEC Articles of Incorporation).

This Philippine school, established in 1992, primarily serves the children of Filipino nationals. From its humble beginnings to the present time, the school has continuously served the children of thousands of Filipino migrant workers. Through the years, the school's aim remains the same; "to be the center of academic excellence as the first Philippine Science School in the Middle East abreast with the dynamics and development of society, culture, Science and Technology and the Arts (QNSA, 2015, 2).

Philippine School Doha serves as the locus of Filipino community activity. Despite being in a foreign land, the school serves as the bastion of Filipino culture and heritage. It is not only a school per se, but a representation of the Filipino community. It is where most Filipinos are able to interact with one another. It promotes unity among Filipinos working overseas. It contributes to shaping the Filipino identity and character of Filipino children and youth overseas (MOPAR, 1, 2015).

Although most of the students are Filipinos, there are also foreign nationals who are currently enrolled. The school caters to non-Filipino students who wish to study in the aforementioned school. The influx of these foreign students became more evident since 2017 when Philippine School Doha transferred to its new campus in Mesaimeer. The wider campus and more advanced educational equipment have encouraged foreign nationals to study in the aforementioned school.

The present research explores the relationship between foreign students of PSD and the impact of the Filipino culture to their way of life. Since schools are not only places of learning, but an avenue where culture is shared and celebrated, the foreigners learn best the Filipino culture not only during class discussion, but the daily interactions they have with their Filipino classmates. As the main agent of socialization, schools have a special place in the transfer of cultural presuppositions. It is in this regard that the existence of Philippine schools in a foreign soil is celebrated. In a nutshell, it is home away from home; where the culture is shared, traditions are practiced, and values are accentuated.

The present study puts forward a discourse on the journey of PSD foreign nationals in becoming more Filipino due to their exposure and immersion to the Filipino way of life. It delves with their lived-experiences being immersed in the Filipino culture. The verbal musings and articulations of the respondents revealed four stages foreign students undergo towards cultural adaptation. These are (1) **IMMERSION** which includes observations and discoveries wherein the foreigners observe and discover new things about the foreign culture; (2) **ALIENATION** which covers conflict and estrangement where the foreigners experience certain conflicts in recognizing the new culture; (3) **PLIANCY** which is composed of conformity and defiance where they decide to obey the prevalent culture and obey the Filipino standards or to be deviant to the prevailing norms to avoid losing one's own identity; and (4) **ACCULTURATION** which consists of adaptation and convergence, wherein the foreigners are able to marry their own local culture with the Filipino culture. At this stage, they would have come to understand why Filipinos do the actions they do, say the words they say, and believe in the ideas they believe in. They would have come to a greater appreciation of the culture as they try to practice it, not for conformity's sake or out of a newly-found respect, but because a deep love for the culture has been born.

IMMERSION

The first step in the cultural adaption of PSD foreign students is immersion. This cultural immersion equips them with diverse perspectives, enhances their creativity, and reduces their biases toward the different others. The witnessing of others' behaviors leads to observations and discoveries wherein the foreign nationals go out of their cultural box. It contends that one's first responsibility is to let the other be than to cast the other in one's own image (Vanhoozer, 2003) It allows them to become more emotionally intelligent because the experience will likely increase their ability to recognize cultural cues and understand which emotional behaviors are appropriate. Moreover, exposure to other cultures will increase cultural intelligence, because it will allow them to recognize cultural differences.

One of the most prevalent factors these foreign nationals are exposed to is the Filipino language. With the language being spoken by their peers and teachers, they find themselves often puzzled and bewildered. This is primarily because they are being exposed to a language they do not understand and the nuances it brings to the conversation have added to the linguistic conundrum. It also impedes them from expressing themselves academically, socially, and emotionally. As the respondents have observed,

"I often listen to my classmate who converse in Filipino. Even my friends sometimes speak Tagalog even if I am around." (R4)

"If everyone in the group is speaking Tagalog and I cannot understand, I find it hard to socialize and sometimes even recite in class." (R2)

Being enrolled in a Philippine school is easier said than done for foreign students. Not only does language barrier occur, misunderstanding and conflict may also arise. As some respondents shared their discoveries,

"Sometimes I feel out of place so they start speaking in English." (R1)

"I misunderstood my friend because I thought she was speaking bad words to me when in fact she was not." (R3)

"I did feel like an outcast when others are speaking in Filipino, because I don't speak Filipino." (R3)

It is in this regard that Philippine School Doha offers Filipino as Second Language (FSL) to foreign nationals. They are being taught basic Filipino words and expressions to be able to converse with the native speakers of the language. As the respondents have observed,

"It helps me in communicating with others, because in FSL they teach me simple Tagalog words." (R2)

"It does help (FSL) because some students have difficulty in communicating that is why it is helpful to learn the Filipino language to be able to communicate." (R5)

"It would help us to understand each other better." (R2)

"I have observed that the school focuses a lot on Filipino culture. It's better to learn their language to be able to communicate with them." (R5)

Although there may be semantic barriers, non-Filipino students are trying to understand the nuances of the Filipino language. While the FSL will never conclusively teach them to speak in Filipino fluently, it will enable them to have a glimpse of the Filipino ways and means.

Aside from the Filipino language, the foreign students are also immersed to some Filipino practices flourishing in PSD. First, they are exposed to 'pagmamano.' It is where students kiss the hand of the elderly, like parents, teachers, and school staff. It is usually an act of respect. It is normally accompanied by saying 'mano po'. As the respondents discovered,

"It is the culture of the school. I just follow them by greeting and doing mano po. This is what I saw the Filipinos are doing, so I tried doing it as well." (R3)

"My friends encourage me to do the 'mano po' as a sign of respect." (R3)

Moreover, the non-Filipino students observed that Filipinos are religious. They have observed that prayers and rituals are necessary parts of any event or class discussion. As the respondents shared,

"We always start and end programs with prayer." R2

"There are many traditions in PSD, but the one I see most is their religiosity. They always pray and spend time during religious celebrations like Christmas and fiestas." (R4)

"Learning the traits of Filipinos who are faithful and God-fearing is important. We always have prayer before and after lessons." (R4)

"Filipinos pray differently than me. But I try to respect their faith." (R4)

Apart from the Filipino language and practices encountered such as religiosity and 'mano po', foreign students are exposed to Filipino values. They have observed that respect for the elderly is one of the most prized values in the Filipino culture. Filipinos are accustomed to using the words "po", "opo", and "ho" when they are conversing with older people or, sometimes, with those who are in a high role or a prestigious member of the society. Using these words is customary in the Philippines and it shows a sign of respect. The younger members of the family also show respect toward older siblings by calling them "kuya" (older brother) or "ate" (older sister). As the respondents discovered,

"The use of 'po' at the end of words to signify respect. At first, I did not understand." (R2)

"The foreign students learned the 'mano po' and to call others 'kuya' and 'ate' not only for adults but also for kids." (R3)

"Respect for the elderly and those older are important. It has also taught me to call my older siblings as kuya and ate rather than just their first name." (R3)

In addition, Filipinos love celebrating events. The festive spirit of the Filipinos is not to be taken lightly. Every month, there is a merriment being celebrated. For instance, every August, PSDians celebrate the "Buwan ng Wika". When December comes, Christmas parties are commemorated here and there. As the respondents have observed,

"Buwan ng Wika is one of the most memorable events in PSD." (R2)

"Filipino are really happy people. Even when life is hard, they still smile and celebrate." (R1)

"When December comes, I look forward to celebrating Christmas parties where we eat, celebrate, and exchange gifts." (R2)

In a nutshell, the foreign students are exposed and ultimately are immersed to the Filipino culture upon their enrolment in PSD. They become first hand witnesses to Filipino practices such as kissing the hand of the elders, saying po and opo. They hear and listen to the Filipino language spoken along the hallways and even in classroom discussion. They see their classmates wear national attires and are enticed to celebrate festivities. Most especially, they are slowly imbibing its cultural presupposition through the daily interaction they have with natives. This is the first step towards cultural adaptation: Immersion.

ALIENATION

Culture is people's way of life. It includes the symbols that provide the shared meanings by which we understand ourselves, pinpoint our deepest aspirations and longings, and construct the worlds we inhabit. And through the symbols of our culture we express and communicate these central aspects of life to each other, while struggling together to determine the meaning of the very symbols we employ in this process (Franke, n.d.) As culture-producing individuals, people create and recreate it. Its tradition, norms, and practices do not only serve as guide, but comprises people's most cherished beliefs. To insult culture is to insult the people sharing it. People's

culture is their identity; identities then are cultural identities.

The ordinariness of culture is defined by its negation, by forces and structures limiting freedom (Snedeker, 2012). This is the reason why identities are only limited to cultural identities. Hence, exposure to foreign culture often leads to culture shock. This is a state wherein the non-Filipinos show perplexity with the Filipino way of doing things; they cannot identify themselves with the culture they are being exposed to. This leads to conflict; the native culture often clashes with the Filipino culture they are being immersed in.

Estrangement is often seen as a major component of culture shock. Foreign students find Filipino cultural practices meaningless and even contradictory to their own practices. Moreover, this happens when these foreign nationals have a hard time establishing rapport and friendship with Filipinos. They can only interact with a few; only those who are foreign national themselves or some who can understand them. As the respondents aired,

"I sometimes find the Filipino's way of life strange. They are different from what I know and practice." (R2)

"There are things that they do that I do not find comfortable doing, so I don't do it like pagmamano." (R1)

"I don't adjust, I just remain myself." (R2)

"I feel left out because it is not my culture and we aren't used to this culture such as wearing the national attire." (R5)

"My friends are the foreigners themselves. I have few Filipino friends, but my foreign friends understand me more." (R1)

Because of cultural differences, the foreign students sometimes feel overt and covert discrimination. Some students readily exclude them from conversation and some classmates may be doing it unconsciously. As the respondents mentioned,

"Usually students respect us for being foreigners and will stop conversing in Filipino and start speaking in English. In some instances, some people do not speak in English in conversations that we are involved in, it shows that we are being neglected." (R5)

"Yes I have been discriminated. A student once told me to go back to Egypt where in fact it is not my country. I have also been stereotyped just because I came from the Middle East. There are times when people will give us look of disgust that shows there is xenophobia." (R5)

"I kind of feel left out since I do not know the Filipino culture and tradition and I feel left out; especially during Buwan ng Wika where my classmates wear Filipiniana." (R5)

When being exposed to a new culture, estrangement and discrimination are inevitable. This is because one's cherished beliefs and practices may not be in harmony with the foreign culture, they are being immersed in. Inevitably, culture shock generates a response: Pliancy.

Estrangement is alienation. When the foreign nationals do come to terms with others' cultures insofar as the former's cultural norms and standards may contradict their own, cultural gap is established. In this case, one is forced into a situation where he/she must adapt or resist to this new culture. This is where the next stage of the journey starts: Pliancy.

PLIANCY

Cultural alienation and dislocation experienced by the immigrant diaspora has always been a constant source of reflection, of people who get torn between two lands, cultures and languages (Challa, 2018). Undoubtedly, it presents as a double-edged sword. Since the foreign students find themselves alienated by a foreign culture, they either choose to adapt or resist change. Culture shock can help the non-Filipino PSD students adapt to the culture or it can further widen the gap between them and the Filipino culture.

On one hand, foreign nationals conform to the Filipino standards. They abide by their classmates' way of life, sometimes doing the things they are doing. They are now able to conform to foreign practices which seemed distant at first without banishing their own. By conforming to the Filipino standards, such foreign nationals can find themselves adapting in the nick of time. Others that do not conform will find it much harder to come into terms with the norms that their classmates abide by. As the respondents shared,

"To show respect for the culture itself, I do not rebel and just abide by norms." (R5)

"I try to adjust by doing the things they do" (R3)

"I have seen them do it on a regular basis. It is taken seriously because it's considered rude. For example, not to bless to the elders and not follow traditions is not correct. It shows disrespect which is offending for elders. They show that you have to bless because it is important and shows respect. It shows that they take their culture seriously." (R5)

"I don't have a choice because I go to PSD, so nothing pursued me except to be like my friends." (R2)

On the other hand, the non-Filipino students sometimes become defiant to the Filipino culture. They want to preserve so much their own culture that they become hostile to the culture they are being exposed to. Such defiance can bring many negative impacts in the school environment. With the majority of students being Filipino, the foreigners student may feel left out which could lead to ethnocentric behaviors. Examples of deviance include,

"I just do not participate in activities that I am not used to doing." (R5)

"I don't practice being too religious because it is prohibited in my religion." (R4)

"I don't really adjust since this is not what I am used to do." (R2)

While some students choose to remain deviant to the Filipino culture, years of stay in PSD has made them more docile and volatile. Hence, slowly, they begin to imbibe Filipino cultural practices and start the journey towards reconciliation of cultures. This is encapsulated by pliancy: the ability of these non-Filipinos to go with the winds of cultural change. Then the last stage of cultural adaption, which is Acculturation, begins.

ACCULTURATION

Acculturation is the final step towards cultural adaptation. This is the stage wherein the students are able to reconcile their own native culture with the Filipino culture they are being exposed to. This is deeper than conformity as it does not only allow the foreigners to conform, but to understand why Filipinos do the actions that they do and say the words they speak.

Convergence, as a form of acculturation, invites the foreign students to be able to cite similarities between their own native culture and the Filipino culture they are being exposed to. As the respondents mentioned,

"The Filipino culture is the same as our culture. We also value religion and the elderly." (R4)

"The Filipino culture is very eye catching since it makes you feel like you are part of something."

It is unique, but the values are the same with us." (R1)

"Filipino culture and my culture are similar in terms of respect for elders." (R3)

Adaptation as a form of acculturation is the way by which an individual learns to adapt the traditional content of a culture and understand its practices and values. They are now enabled to practice the Filipino culture which starts the road towards cultural adaptation. They begin to do the *'pagmamano'*, use *'po'* and *'opo'* in conversation, become more religious, and practice other Filipino traits and values. They begin to learn Filipino words in the conversational table. This is not mere conformity, but the foreign students have formed an allegiance to the Filipino culture. In a way, they have made it their own. As the respondents mentioned,

"I know understood why Filipinos behave the way they do. I have come to greater appreciation for them and what they believe in." (R1)

"I love the Filipino language and culture. I am enjoying it, because, the more I enjoy, the more I learn how to speak in Filipino and understand the language." (R3)

"Learning their culture, habits, and everyday lives has become a part of me." (R1)

Truly, the Filipino culture is rich and alluring. The foreign students may have perceived it as bizarre and eccentric at first, but deep immersion has enabled them to conform and eventually adapt. Through the process of acculturation, they have become more Filipino; people who came from a different culture, but became Filipino in mind and spirit.

DISCUSSION

The Filipino culture is a melting pot: a by-product of cultures from both the east and west smashed together. It is a mix of indigenous and global influences that spans hundreds of millennia. It is diverse yet one; composite but beautiful.

The Filipino culture boasts a lot of traditions hailing from the eastern and western hemispheres. Since Filipinos are of mixed heritage (including Malay, Chinese, American, Spanish, and Arab), they have a unique blend of both East and West in terms of culture, appearance, and character (Department of Tourism, [n.d.](#)). On one hand, western influences started when the first group of Europeans reached the Philippine shores. Since then, western ideologies, products, and values have struck the Filipino culture like a storm. On the other hand, Eastern influences have been as pervasive as its western counterpart. The Philippines, being an Asian country has been influenced heavily by its neighbors such as China, Japan, and Korea.

What balances the spectrum are the indigenous concepts that form the glue that bind western and eastern influences. Although the Filipino culture is a tapestry with different cultures as its thread and needle, the deep-

seated beliefs and practices Filipinos have which are rooted in their sacred traditions and time-tested wisdom complete the bigger picture. Indeed, the indigenous part of culture plays a big part in the Filipino culture.

The Philippine's charm lies in its colorful history. Years of colonization and indigenous concepts have mixed up in the cultural cauldron to create something complex yet beautiful. The Filipino culture is carrying a vivacious story that conveys the country's voyage through the periods. Tradition is part of their blood, including the Filipino's faith, their *bayanihan*, their empathy with their surroundings, and their celebration of success. Filipino loves to smile even in the midst of trials. Filipino people have various religious festivals that honor nature, the divine and the cycles of life that showcases *pakikipag-kapwa tao* by promoting relationships in the neighborhood, not only in other people but also Filipinos marked them of having a close family ties relationship (Asian journal media center, 2017).

As culture is important to the individual in search for existential and collective meaning, schools become agents of it. Schools are not only places of learning, but places of socialization. The latent function of school is to inculcate in the student's social skills while acting an avenue for cultural interaction and exchange. In this regard, schools become one of the vehicles of culture; a place where culture is celebrated and shared.

As such, even schools in a foreign country never cease to become agents of culture. Philippine School Doha, though may reside in a foreign country, is a paragon of Filipino pride. This is a school for and by Filipinos; whose practices are deeply rooted in the Filipino way of life. In a way, it does its best to give nostalgic feelings of home to its clientele. It is home away from home so to speak.

With the school's effort to make its people feel like they are back in the Philippines, it affects the mind-set of the few foreign individuals studying in Philippine School Doha. While majority of the students are Filipinos, the school has opened its doors to a few foreign nationals as well. Hence, these foreign nationals do not only learn subjects, they have become acquainted with the Filipino culture. They have been exposed, immersed, and as a consequence, have acculturated Filipino practices. They have become more Filipino. They have adapted Filipino beliefs and practices while retaining their own. The marriage between their local culture and the Filipino culture has come into fruition.

Rockett (2016) argues that students, like travelers to foreign lands and cultures, enter the university facing new expectations and ideas for which many frequently find themselves ill-prepared. They might struggle as they learn to speak and write amid the expectations found within the discourse communities. Their identities may be challenged as they face new roles as academics. They may even struggle to develop confidence, self-efficacy, or ownership of their texts amid the many other voices in academia.

The results derived from the respondents' verbalization revealed four stages that the foreign nationals go through on their journey towards cultural adaption. Central to this adaptation process is one's ability to communicate in accordance to the norms and practices of the host culture and continuous and active engagement in the interpersonal and mass communication activities of the host society (Kim, 2017). While acculturation is an on-going process and never a finished product, the study describes what these foreign nationals have been through to have acculturated Filipino traits and practices. Enrolling in a Philippine school (1) **immersed** the non-Filipinos to the Filipino way of life. Since culture defines the individuals, they experience (2) **alienation** especially when they are introduced to practices foreign to their own native culture. This alienation ushers (3) **Pliancy** enabling them to be flexible enough to accept the Filipino culture and as they experience the Filipino culture first hand, they cannot not (4) **Adapt**. Long-time exposure and immersion and the versatility of these foreign nationals enabled them to become Filipino.

Immersion

Cultural immersion is the first stage in the journey towards cultural adaptation. This stage sets the opportunity for the foreigners to observe the Filipino ways and practices. The experience of being exposed to a new and different environment and the cultural impact of interacting with the natives will be the start of their journey towards cultural appreciation. This stage paves the way for the foreign nationals to be able to view reality from the Filipino's point-of-view.

Exposing and immersing a student from one culture to another presupposes a lot of changes. A foreign student being positioned in an unusual environment needs to adapt practices to function effectively.

Tan (2019) describes multicultural experience as those experiences gained through individuals' contact with other cultures. When foreigners are exposed and immersed to these cultural practices, they adjust and compare them to the ones they are used to. This will help them to understand and will allow them to be open to accepting other cultures that are unusual to them.

In this first stage, the foreign nationals are immersed to local practices and customs. They see their classmates, friends, and even teachers observe religiosity, practice hospitality, and show respect for the elderly. They hear Filipino words and titular titles such as *ate* or *kuya*, *manong* or *manang*, use *po* and *opo* in conversation,

and eat rice as often as possible. These experiences give them an inkling of what the Filipino culture is all about.

The non-Filipino's enrolment in PSD will definitely start the journey towards acculturation. They begin to witness how the Filipinos live their lives and interpret reality. For instance, for the Filipino, the family stands at the heart of the social life (Mulder, 1993) as evidenced by their deep love for family members and the practice of *pagmamano*. Filipino children come up to their parents or teachers upon arriving home or seeing them in the hallways of the school, and instead of greeting them with a hug or a kiss, they take the elder's hand and places the back of it to their forehead. This gesture is known as *pagmamano*. Escalona (2017) describes it as an act of respect, usually done to someone either older or a person of the religious order (usually a priest). It is usually accompanied by saying '*mano po*', *mano* meaning 'hand' in Spanish and *po*, a particle in Filipino speech used to express respect.

The Filipino family is a very important value in Filipino culture, if not its highest and most pervasive one (Miranda, 1992). Not only does it provide the basic material needs of its members, it also gives a sense of security, belongingness, and acceptance. It is the basic unit of society and the first level of the social fabric as it is the most fundamental vehicle of culture. A Filipino then is born and raised within a family and will spend most of his life, if not his entire life within the parameters of his family. "The idea of autonomy, self-achievement, and independence so prevalent in the Western cultures sound rather strange to Filipino ears, more use to the phenomenon of intensive mutual interdependence. In fact, an early desire to live independently from family or friends is frowned upon as egoistic and proud attitude (Jose & Tesoro, 2004).

One of the mechanisms to maintain the good order of the family is its hierarchical organization, expressing respect for status and seniority (Mulder, 1993). Hence, certain titular titles are mentioned whenever a Filipino is speaking to someone older than him/her. This hierarchical structure may be complex and multifaceted, but one that the foreign students have observed and discovered. As such, they become first hand witnesses to the big person mentality that the Filipino culture espouses.

The Filipino is trained to venerate parents and elders first and foremost (Tesoro & Jose, 2004). The young show reverence to the elders by respecting their opinions and listening to their pieces of advice. Expression like *po* and *opo* and reverent practices such as taking the hand of the elder (*mano po*) are highly valued. Filipinos value family and they take the necessary steps in the preservation of this family.

While Philippine School Doha is situated in the Middle East, the practice of '*pagmamano*' thrives. This is the reason why foreign nationals consider Filipinos as respectful to the elderly. Even the use of the particles of speech in Tagalog, such as '*po*' and '*opo*', express courtesy when speaking to elders. Foreign students, after constant exposure to these words and practices of respect are able to imbibe and practice these in their daily life.

Another prevalent cultural practice the foreign students have been immersed to is Filipino religiosity. The Asian journal media center (2016) explains that the Philippines' provisional past under diverse foreign colonizers brought with it varying influences, including that of religion and belief systems. From the ancient times to the present era, religiosity has been a normal part of life. Since the time of the ancient Filipinos to colonization and emancipation and until the present time, Filipino's have always had a deep desire to commune with the divine.

Filipinos also have a religious conception of God. They have the habit of associating to God all the things that happen in their lives. They are convinced that events happen under God's gaze and influence, and this conviction, coupled with recurrent experience of human indigence (typhoons, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, diseases, other natural disasters) leads to the acknowledgement of dependence upon a higher being, and the imploration of that being's protection (Tesoro & Jose, 2004). This is the reason why Filipinos would often be heard saying '*Bahala na*', its etymology coming from the word '*Bathala*'; the supreme deity of the ancient Filipinos. This kind of divine resignation echoes the Filipinos' religiosity at the same time trust in fate's (*kapalaran*) hands. It can mean complete resignation to Providence or God's will, as when a mother resigns herself when she knows that her child's sickness is incurable (Mercado, 1975).

Philippine School Doha may be located in the Middle East, but practices pertaining to religions are very much existing. The foreign students have observed that Filipinos have an intimate communion with the divine; a trait passed down from one generation to another. It is actually one of the school's core values: Pro- God.

In addition, foreign nationals have observed that Filipinos are simply happy people. Filipinos are known for their ability to smile through their troubles, and to find something to laugh about even in trying times. Whatever happens, Filipinos still find a reason to smile. In the simplest situation in the school, especially in senior high school, students are being trained to handle loads of works to practice time and pressure management. In this sample circumstances, it is evident that Filipino students carry this value in the midst of hardship; they continue to think positive and still managed to laugh and have fun. In that way, they can easily find solutions in their loads of work.

Moreover, one value that stands above the rest is hospitality. What makes Filipino culture unique is hospitality (Sy & Chang, 2019: Department of Tourism, n.d.). Filipinos are hospitable and non-discriminatory. They accept people regardless of their station in life; a common trait Filipinos are very known for. Foreigners who have

experienced wandering around the world can attest to it. They make sure that their visitors are treated well and entertained even those they just met.

Immersion to other cultures is not only about engagement with a new set of practices, but to a new language, and consequently to a new worldview. Language identifies a people more than other traits, including customs, traditions, dressing, attitudes and other behavioral patterns (Ramos, 2015). Foreign nationals begin cultural acceptance by being exposed to the Filipino language. They hear the Filipino language in daily conversation and begin to have a slight understanding of what the words mean. In the situation of the foreign students, Filipino students are welcoming enough to teach the new students the basic words that foreigners can use in their daily conversations. They are exposed to Filipino subjects and other programs like FSL. Likewise, foreign students share their culture and their own native language to the Filipino students to be able to compare and find similarities between cultures. Insofar as language is the quintessential avenue to cultural understanding (Miranda, 1992).

Alienation

“Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, n.d.). It is a word for ‘way of life’ of groups of people; the way they do things. It can be seen in people’s writing, religion, music, clothes, cooking, the way they do things, and things that they do. It is inherited; transmissible from parent to offspring which means the culture of the parent is the culture of the offspring.

To be human is to be embedded in culture and to participate in the process of interpretation and the creation of meaning as we reflect on and internalize the cultural symbols that we share with others in numerous conversations that shape our ever-shifting contexts (Franke, n.d.). It is the big umbrella which includes religion, politics, language, economy, kinship and other aspects which affect a group of people (Mercado, 1992).

In a way, people are their culture. Hence, separating their identities from culture is easier said than done for the latter forms and creates who they are. Culture can also be seen as one of the factors in our identity. Its effects are permeating; a mold that shapes them and implants in them certain practices, values, and beliefs.

Social interactions pave the way for the transmission of culture. This is because when people interact, cultural exchange becomes its by-product. Hence, whenever people from other cultures meet and integrate, cultural exchange happens. But this exchange is not always exclusively mutual for one culture tends to be stronger than the other. This exchange may somehow overpower the inferior culture in ways more than one.

While the Filipino culture does not claim superiority over other cultures, it is the dominant culture in Philippine School Doha. This is primarily because most of its stockholders are Filipinos. Hence, the Filipino culture is alive and thriving in this school. As a consequence, non-Filipino students may sometimes feel overwhelmed by the culture’s influences. Verdier (2017) said that the first stage, minority individuals have to decide whether or not they want to assimilate to the majority culture while, in the second stage, all individuals (both from the majority and the minority group) embedded in a network have to decide how much effort they exert in some activity (say education).

The journey towards cultural adaptation is characterized by cultural alienation; a place where the outsider feels detached and indifferent. Since culture is people’s way of life, the non-Filipino students may feel left out and confused with regard to the new way of life being shown to them.

When foreign students are immersed to a different culture, issues are certainly inevitable. This is because their normal way of doing things is tempered by a new set of presuppositions which may be in contrast to what has been traditionally done. This causes confusion, discomfort, and ultimately alienation. The sense of belongingness that foreign students should feel from the school is now being put to the test.

Although a perplexing concept, alienation has always been a phenomenon of central concern in the sociological exploration. According to Leopold and David (2018) “The concept of alienation identifies a distinct kind of psychology or social ill.” Alienation is where one is in a state of unknowingly following or doing a certain set of culture and moreover it is a state in social interactions where one is redirected by a low degree of integration or common values and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals, or between an individual and a group of people in a community.

As alienation characterizes the initial experience of foreign students upon exposure to a new culture, culture shock immediately follows. It is the feeling of disorientation experienced by someone when they are suddenly subjected or exposed to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes. It comes to students as they will meet academic encounters while at the same time learning the new culture they are experiencing.

Culture shock is the feeling of uncertainty, confusion, or anxiety that people experience when visiting, doing business in, or living in a society that is different from their own. Social norms can vary significantly across

countries and regions. Culture shock can arise from an individual's unfamiliarity with local customs, language, and acceptable behavior (Segal, 2019).

Culture shock is the feeling of disorientation especially when one is immersed in different set of culture. It was coined to understand what expatriate sojourners undergo through, which was characterized by an increased incidence of depression, related to "culture loss", and apprehension or anxiety, related to doubt over how to live in a new cultural milieu (Fitzpatrick). It is usually most concentrated at the beginning of one's exposure to a new culture. At first people are usually thrilled to be in their new environment, new people to interact with, it is also where one can make a new version of themselves but there is an exception; culture shock can be fatal especially in accordance to time, a short-term basis can be thrilling, but in a long-term basis, this "celebratory" phase will eventually end.

Cupsa (2018) specified that culture shock involves a powerful, transformative process that takes place at both the individual and societal levels as important cultural forces are clashing. Michael Winkelman (2017) identified Cultural (or culture) shock as a multifaceted experience resulting from numerous stressors occurring in contact with a different culture. Winkelman (2017) also stated that Cultural shock occurs for immigrant groups (e.g., foreign students and refugees; businessmen on overseas assignments as well as for Euro-Americans in their own culture and society.)

The non-Filipino students may have had experienced culture shock upon enrolment in PSD. When the honeymoon period is over, they may have realized that things are done differently in this school than their previous school. They may have thought the way Filipinos live is different from the way they have lived their lives.

According to Marvin (2015) No matter where you are in your study abroad journey, whether you're still in the planning stages or you're settling in to your student accommodation, you are likely to experience culture shock at some point. Culture shock can adversely affect many aspects of university life, from your academic performance and career prospects to your overall physical and mental health.

Many foreign students feel culture shock when immersed to the Filipino culture. The cultural climate may be different from what they are used to be. They hear words that they find irrelevant and absurd. The Filipino language becomes alienating as well insofar as the culture understands and explains itself in its own terms: categories, structure, and style (De Mesa, 2003).

Culture shock is often related to conflict. Conflict happens when the cultural attributes of the native culture are in jeopardy with the new culture being introduced. When one is unable to follow the new cultural trends being introduced and when the cultural norms are in contrary to their own cherished beliefs, an internal struggle is all but inevitable. The need to adapt is balanced by the want to retain their own.

In Philippine School Doha, diversity is very evident and in diversity, conflict is prominent. Foreign students tend to develop negative attitudes towards the school because of the fact that these students do not really know the essence of why they keep doing things they usually do not do, celebrate events they do not really celebrate, and learn a language they cannot call their own. More so, they experience challenges such as language barriers, isolation, and the feeling of forgetting one's culture just to amend to the culture they are experiencing. Education may be the key to every door to the society but to these foreign students, it becomes a pressing task as exposure to new and different cultures make the learning process more arduous. Alienation is indeed a tall order to overcome.

Pliancy

Upon immersion and the experience of alienation, foreign students are faced with two choices: to conform and be accepted or to defy and be isolated. On one hand, the students may opt to conform to the new environment and do what the locals are doing. On the other hand, they may stay faithful to their culture and look at the foreign culture with contempt.

Hodges (2019) argues that conformity is a natural affinity essential to human culture, group, and dialogical relationships." Conformity is the need to become a part of something bigger that is why people force themselves to conform to their setting and be part of something bigger. Conformity in human psychology and has been described as the phenomenon in which individuals change their behavior to match the behavior displayed by the majority of group members (Leeuwen & Haun, 2014). It is a powerful thing especially with Filipinos where they do everything together. This is known as "*pakikisama*." Filipinos have close ties with friends and influences foreigners as well. Although this might be good in hindsight, it is actually bad since you have to conform to the wants of the group even if it compromises what you want to do. Conformity is a powerful force in human decision making and is best understood from an evolutionary perspective (Coultais, & Leeuwen, 2015).

Humans have a tendency to forgo their own attitudes in order to align themselves with the interest of the majority (Sun & Yu, 2016). Since humans are social beings, it is a necessity for them to be socially accepted and to

fit in. It is instinctive for humans to conform especially when one benefits from what he or she is doing. This maybe is the reason why the foreign students opt to conform; to do the things that the Filipinos are doing to fit in and belong. Pliancy characterizes the third stage in the adaptation journey. They begin to realize that fitting in is crucial than being left out.

While conformity is key towards acculturation, there are a few foreign students who want to retain their native culture. These conservative students become hostile to the idea of combining other elements into one's own culture. They become deviant and try to avoid practicing the local culture for numerous reasons such as it opposes their culture or they feel awkward incorporating a different culture.

A few non-Filipino students become deviant. Deviance, as a sociological phenomenon, refers to behavior that is not approved by the society. For students, this includes cutting classes or not following class and school regulations, etc (Shirasa & Azuma, n.d). Being defiant of another culture is an expected reaction from a person who has entered a new setting. He or she may be in awe of how different the setting is and how unprepared he or she was when encountering this. "normalization of deviance" grapples with people's behaviors that are often counter-productive to achieving the wanted end but is often hidden or "normal" that organizational actors are either unaware of them or assume that this behavior is a natural part of the management process Pinto (2014).

In the social setting of Philippine School Doha, deviant behavior does not only mean disobedience to written rules and policies, but the refusal to follow cultural norms and practices. While there is nothing wrong in preserving one's own culture, conservatism may further alienate foreign students. This defiant attitude does no one real favor; both harming the foreign and local students in many areas of their lives.

Balance should be strike between conservatism and conformity. Students must conform to the set norms, but also not lose touch of their deeply-held beliefs. The marriage between the foreign and the local must be realized. Acculturation then concludes the journey. Pliancy sets the stage.

Acculturation

The road to cultural adaptation is a long and stressful one. It is filled with potholes and bumps. It has detours all around the place. It is a journey worth having nevertheless.

Foreign students experience numerous difficulties in adapting to a new environment. Nevertheless, this does not discourage them from truly acculturating the Filipino culture into their own. Through acculturation, they are able to make sense of the new environment around them as they acquire new-fangled norms and values of the host culture. The acculturation process includes relatively stable changes people have to make in response to external demands (Berry, 1997: Neto, 2019).

Acculturation itself is a way of developing and learning the practices of a particular environment to create a deeper comprehension of context. As human beings, it is a test of capability and understanding on how people can adjust in a certain community. If a person approaches a culture or context openly, is willing to learn the necessary language or languages, and is willing to read and appropriate sociological and anthropological literature about a particular culture, he or she can understand much of what the particular culture is all about (Bevans, 2003).

Acculturation allows foreign students to be in touch with the 'other.' It recognizes the fact the conformity is shallow and conservatism is harmful. It is a process wherein the individual does not lose anything, but gains something along the way. It paves the way for the creation of cultural adaptability skills that the foreign students can use to facilitate cultural exchanges.

Conformity is the stepping stone towards true adaptation. While it is the initial step, it need not be the finale. True adaptation, as acculturation, happens when foreign students do the things their local counterparts do, not because of sheer social acceptance, but because they have understood what the cultural symbol represents. Hence, they do the '*pagmamano*' and uses *po* and *opo* in conversation neither because it is a fad nor it is the right thing to do, but because Filipinos have a deep respect for the elderly. According to Young (2017) "The process of adapting to an unfamiliar culture unfolds through the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, a process that is deeply rooted in the natural human tendency to achieve an internal equilibrium in the face of adversarial environmental conditions." In this kind of process, changes are evident through the pattern, communication, character and perspective. "Central to this adaptation process are one's ability to communicate in accordance to the norms and practices of the host culture and continuous and active engagement in the interpersonal and mass communication activities of the host society."

Acculturation allows two varying cultures to fuse and become one. Convergence is key as the practices and norms are blending in; the foreign students become foreign and local at the same time. They now begin to pick out points of convergences in both cultures and mitigate divergences if possible. When two cultures interact, it learns the practices of one another. Wherein the act of understanding is involved in the process, the way convergence is present among the foreign students who are learning the Filipino culture showcases the points of connections;

enabling them to realize that the Filipino culture is not that eccentric and different. Not only do they learn, but they adapt the patterns and practices prevalent. Through convergence, the non-Filipino students begin to adjust and apply the changes to their own culture and practices. According to Burgees, (2017) convergence is a dynamic of change. In the most neutral and general sense, it describes the tendency for separate streams or pathways (whether of matter, of technologies, or of biological life) to come together. Convergence is the tendency of cultural forms, and/or social practices to come together to perform similar functions and make new hybrid cultural system for the non-Filipino students to use whenever they see fit.

In a nutshell, acculturation is the surest way towards cultural adaptation. Their gradual and genuine adaptation to the Filipino culture is a journey that started the moment they have enrolled in the school and may even last a lifetime. While there are challenges along the way, the alluring precepts of the Filipino culture are certainly some of the things that they cannot resist. This is not an overnight process, but a product of long and constant interaction with the Filipinos they encounter in the journey.

CONCLUSION

Immigration is a growing phenomenon in modern societies and results in increasing heterogeneity of cultural attitudes and values (Aumann & Titzmann, 2018). This diaspora of cultural identities has increased exponentially over the years. As more Filipinos decide to migrate, they do not only bring with them themselves, but they represent the Filipino culture and proliferate the Filipino way of life. And as more and more Filipinos journey across the world, their cultural footprints are left behind.

Philippine School Doha has been offering quality education to students since its inception in 1992. Several years have passed by, but its vision remains the same. While majority of the students are Filipinos, there are a few foreign nationals who decided to enroll and experience the Filipino culture first hand. Not only were they given the best education a Philippine school has to offer, they have acculturated and adapted the Filipino way of life. In a way, they came out of the school differently than when they first came in.

This qualitative phenomenological research discusses the lived experiences of foreign students enrolled in Philippine School Doha. The goal was to unravel the journey they go through as they integrate with Filipinos and their culture. Through the verbalization of their experiences, it was discovered that their journey is marked by four stages. The first one being **immersion** where the non-Filipinos observe and discover Filipino cultural practices and ideas. Since culture defines the individuals, non-foreigners, upon exposure to the Filipino culture, encounters **alienation**; a state where they cannot identify themselves with the different culture they are immersed in. Hence, they experience culture shock as some Filipino customs may be in contrary to their deeply cherished beliefs. This alienation ushers two responses: **Pliancy**. Foreigners are faced with a dilemma, to conform and be accepted, or to defy and be isolated. Since exposure turns to immersion, they now start to acculturate Filipino practices to make them their own. **Acculturation** becomes the last stop over in the journey as they begin to realize that the Filipino culture is not really different from what they practice. They begin to adapt, not only to be able to pass their subjects, but to make their stay in PSD more meaningful and fun.

The journey of foreign students in Philippine School Doha is long and winding. The amalgamation of their experiences enable them to gain a greater appreciation for the Filipino culture, infusing in them a Filipino consciousness. To say that acculturation is the last stage, however, is actually a misnomer. This is not the end per se, but a pit stop as the journey is a never ending process.

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