

The Pedagogical Strategies of Filipino EFL Tutors for Non-Filipino Learners: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences and pedagogical practices of Filipino English as a Foreign Language (EFL) tutors in one-to-one synchronous online instruction, an increasingly important mode of global language education. As online tutoring continues to expand, tutors must respond to diverse learners while teaching through digitally mediated environments. However, limited research has examined how Filipino EFL tutors experience their teaching practices in culturally diverse one-to-one online contexts. The study aimed to explore how tutors adapt their instructional strategies, respond to classroom demands, and interpret their professional roles in synchronous online teaching. The study used a qualitative research design guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with seven Filipino EFL tutors who had at least two years of online teaching experience. The analysis focused on understanding how tutors make sense of their lived experiences while teaching learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in virtual settings. The findings show that tutors experience one-to-one online teaching as requiring continuous adjustment to learners' participation, proficiency, pace, and emotional state. Tutors actively sustain engagement by using multimodal strategies, digital tools, and interactive techniques suited to the online environment. They also build connection with learners to support confidence and participation. Tutors recognize that their instructional decisions are shaped by institutional conditions such as structured lessons, time limits, and platform expectations. Over time, tutors develop greater confidence and adaptability through repeated exposure to diverse teaching situations. They also become more aware of cultural differences that influence communication and interaction. Overall, the study suggests that effective online EFL teaching involves adaptive expertise, relational attentiveness, emotional regulation, and intercultural awareness. These findings provide insights for teacher training, professional support, and future research on one-to-one online language instruction, particularly for enhancing the quality of online EFL teaching and informing professional development.

Keywords: pedagogical strategies, one-to-one synchronous online instruction, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, EFL tutors, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Pedagogical strategies refer to the deliberate methods, techniques, and approaches that teachers use to facilitate learning and achieve instructional goals (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In online environments, implementing pedagogical strategies remains challenging. Limited nonverbal cues, scripted instruction, and rigid lesson formats often hinder authentic interaction and feedback (Hasper & Barkhuizen, 2023; Sun et al., 2023). Technical issues, digital fatigue, and insufficient training in educational technologies further restrict tutors' ability to apply scaffolding and questioning effectively (Cukurova et al., 2022; Jeong, 2023). Among Filipino tutors, the absence of standardized frameworks and the emphasis on rapport over accuracy exacerbate these problems (Dela Cruz et al., 2024; Gallo & Raymundo, 2024).

In the international setting, several studies have examined pedagogical strategies in online tutoring and their associated challenges. In the United Kingdom, Cukurova et al. (2022) found that limited training in learning

analytics hindered tutors' ability to interpret learner data and use it for responsive scaffolding and instructional decision-making, thereby reducing engagement and pedagogical effectiveness. In New Zealand, Hasper and Barkhuizen (2023) reported that interactional strategies such as guided questioning, modeling, and elicitation were less effective online due to reduced nonverbal cues and rigid lesson structures that constrained authentic communication. In China, Sun et al. (2023) identified scripted, teacher-centered lessons as a major constraint, as they restricted spontaneous interaction and meaningful learner participation. Similarly, in South Korea, Jeong (2023) observed that the integration of digital tools within communicative pedagogies was undermined by technical limitations and insufficient teacher preparation, resulting in form-focused instruction that limited meaningful language use.

In the Philippine context, several pedagogical strategies used in EFL tutoring have shown notable limitations. Dela Cruz et al. (2024) found that communicative and conversational approaches in online tutoring, while promoting rapport in screen-mediated interaction, often lack linguistic rigor, resulting in insufficient corrective feedback and reduced accuracy. Similarly, Gallo and Raymundo (2024) highlighted that the lack of standardized teaching frameworks in online platforms results in the use of intuitive or improvised instructional strategies, which undermine consistency and coherence in achieving lesson objectives. These issues underscore the need to examine and document the pedagogical strategies of Filipino EFL tutors to identify which practices truly support effective and culturally responsive language learning in online settings.

Despite the growing prominence of online EFL tutoring, there remains a limited understanding of how Filipino tutors design and apply pedagogical strategies in virtual one-to-one instruction. Existing studies have identified issues such as inconsistent engagement techniques, insufficient integration of digital tools, and lack of instructional alignment (Cukurova et al., 2022; Jeong, 2023; Dela Cruz et al., 2024), yet few have explored the specific teaching methods, interactional patterns, and adaptive strategies that Filipino tutors employ in online settings. As Gallo and Raymundo (2024) emphasize, the absence of systematic documentation on these practices creates a significant research gap, hindering efforts to evaluate what makes their pedagogy effective or limiting in promoting communicative competence and learner autonomy. This gap underscores the need to investigate and describe the pedagogical strategies of Filipino EFL tutors to inform evidence-based frameworks that enhance instructional quality in global online education. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the narratives of Filipino EFL tutors on employing pedagogical strategies in one-to-one synchronous online lessons with foreign learners?; (2) How do Filipino EFL tutors deal with the challenges of implementing their pedagogical strategies?; and (3) How do Filipino EFL tutors interpret their pedagogical roles and respond to the challenges of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners in virtual environments?

In addressing these questions, the study aimed to provide a clearer understanding of how Filipino EFL tutors practice adaptive, relational, and context-sensitive teaching in one-to-one online contexts, and to offer insights for culturally responsive and effective online English instruction.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design to understand the lived experiences of Filipino EFL tutors in one-to-one online teaching contexts. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that qualitative research is appropriate for exploring complex phenomena and understanding human experiences from the perspectives of those who live them. Specifically, the study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its methodological framework. Smith and Nizza (2021) explained that IPA seeks to understand how individuals interpret significant life experiences. IPA aligned with qualitative research because both emphasized subjectivity, context, and meaning-making.

Respondents and Sampling Procedure

This qualitative study explored the experiences of seven Filipino EFL tutors as they navigated one-to-one

online teaching with foreign learners. The participants were exclusively Filipino tutors to ensure that the study focused on pedagogical strategies and lived experiences specific to this group. They were selected based on their ability to reflect meaningfully on their teaching practices and provide rich narratives suitable for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The participants were recruited using purposive sampling, complemented by snowball sampling, in which initial participants referred other tutors who met the study criteria, as described by Naderifar et al. (2017).

Data Collection

The data collection process began with the researcher securing endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School for ethics review, followed by submission of required documents to the University Ethics Review Committee for ethical clearance. Upon approval, final endorsement was obtained to proceed with the study. All interviews were conducted online through secure video-conferencing platforms, as the researcher was based outside the Philippines. Potential participants were contacted via Messenger using publicly available professional profiles. Interested individuals received the Informed Consent Form (ICF) and were given two days to review and sign electronically. Interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times using Zoom, Google Meet, or similar platforms.

Before each session, participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time. Consent for audio recording was obtained prior to each interview. Semi-structured interviews lasted 30–90 minutes, with field notes documenting contextual details. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and member checking was conducted to ensure accuracy. Data were anonymized using pseudonyms and stored securely following the Data Privacy Act of 2012. These procedures ensured ethical rigor, confidentiality, and trustworthy data collection.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data in this study were analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework proposed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), enriched by van Manen's (1990, 2017) hermeneutic phenomenological orientation. Smith et al.'s framework provided a structured approach to examining participants' lived experiences, while van Manen's perspective emphasized reflective interpretation and the uncovering of essential meanings in human experience. Together, these approaches enabled a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how Filipino EFL tutors made sense of their pedagogical experiences in one-to-one synchronous online lessons.

Limitations of the Study

While the findings offer valuable insights into the pedagogical realities of Filipino online ESL tutors, they were not generalizable to all tutors due to variations in teaching platforms, learner demographics, and individual teaching styles. Also, this study did not include classroom observations or recorded lesson analyses and instead relied solely on participants' narratives gathered through in-depth interviews (IDIs), which may have introduced recall bias and limited the ability to verify reported practices.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was enhanced through the use of detailed field notes, peer debriefing, and member checking of personal experiential themes of participants to ensure that interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences. Consistent with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study-maintained transparency in the analytic process and reflexive engagement with the data. Furthermore, the study adhered to the framework of Lincoln and Guba (1985), emphasizing credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability.

RESULTS

This section presents the research findings through an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of Filipino EFL tutors engaged in one-to-one synchronous online instruction with foreign learners.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Pseudonym	Educational Background	EFL Teaching Experience	Learners Nationality	Learners age/Level of English Proficiency
Teacher 1	Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies	8 years	European, Japanese, Chinese	2 years old to adults [Lv. 0] Beginner to Advanced
Teacher 2	Bachelor of Elementary Education-Generalist	2 years and above	European, Arab, Thai, Malay, Chinese	Toddlers to adults [Lv. 0] Beginner to Advanced
Teacher 3	Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English	6 years	Chinese, Taiwanese, Hongkongers	Toddlers to professionals [Lv. 0] Beginner to Advanced
Teacher 4	Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English	2 years	Chinese, Taiwanese	6 to 40 years old [Lv. 0] Beginner to Advanced
Teacher 5	Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English	5 years	Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Chinese, Spanish, Mexican	3 years old to retirees [Lv. 0] Beginner to Advanced
Teacher 6	Bachelor of Science in Office Administration	5 years	Japanese, Chinese, Polish, Hebrew, Turkish, Korean, Americans, Europeans	4 to 42 years old [Lv. 0] Beginner to Advanced
Teacher 7	Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English	4 years	Portuguese, Polish, Hebrew, Turkish, Spanish, Russian, Japanese, Chinese	2 years old to adults [Lv. 0] Beginner to Advanced

Teacher 1. She views effective one-on-one online EFL teaching as a dynamic and relational practice that focuses on keeping students interested, making instructions clear, and giving emotional support. She stressed how important it is to make classes engaging and interesting and to use chunking and multimodal resources to make English easier to understand in virtual situations. Teacher 1 says that teaching means being flexible all the time, changing plans when things don't go as planned, being honest with parents when problems come up, and framing mistakes as normal to help students feel less anxious. She's also aware that her job is to be caring and culturally aware, and she acts as a mediator who respects the different cultures of her students.

Teacher 1: Personal Experiential Themes

- Experiencing continuous pedagogical recalibration and in-the-moment strategy shifts during online one-to-one teaching
- Experiencing engagement as continuous relational work that requires active effort and presence
- Experiencing linguistic simplification and chunking as responsive scaffolding to support learner comprehension
- Experiencing the need to recreate physical presence through multimodal teaching practices
- Experiencing sustained professional accountability and responsiveness under constant visibility in digital teaching
- Experiencing the management of instructional and emotional challenges through protecting learner confidence and providing reassurance
- Experiencing the pedagogical role as care-oriented and relational in digitally mediated one-to-one contexts
- Experiencing the need to manage cultural boundaries carefully when interacting with diverse learners

Teacher 2. She views that effective one-on-one online EFL teaching is a structured and responsive practice that combines learner-centered methods with the needs of teaching on a platform. She always changes her teaching style based on how well her students are doing. For example, she uses gestures, realia, and rewards to help young and beginner students, and she encourages adults to talk and use language in a critical way. Even though she has to follow strict lesson plans, she finds ways to make the lessons more personal by breaking down tasks and explaining ideas in simple terms. Teacher 2 faces the daily challenges of time constraints and students' disengagement in learning. She deals with these problems by making lesson adjustment, playful negotiation, and communicating with the parents. She sees her role as a teacher as both a guide and a cultural mediator. She encourages students to use English while sensitively managing topics that may conflict with learners' traditions.

Teacher 2: Personal Experiential Themes

- **Experiencing continuous instructional decision-making through real-time pedagogical adjustment in one-to-one online lessons**
- **Differentiating instruction through proficiency-based adaptation to support learner comprehension**
- **Using visual, concrete, and motivational supports to facilitate understanding in digitally mediated interaction**
- **Experiencing the challenge of implementing pedagogical strategies within structured company systems while exercising personal initiative.**
- **Experiencing Behavior Management Through Negotiation and Parental Collaboration.**
- **Positioning the pedagogical role as a flexible, learner-centered guide in diverse one-to-one online contexts**
- **Maintaining interpersonal balance when interacting with culturally and linguistically diverse learners**
- **Creating an emotionally safe and culturally sensitive online learning environment**

Teacher 3. She views one-to-one online EFL teaching as a flexible and learner-centered practice that requires constant adaptation, emotional awareness, and creative engagement. She emphasizes using TPR, realia, and

translation tools to support comprehension, especially for beginners, while adjusting her tone and strategies based on student mood and feedback. When planned activities fail, she re-engages learners through movement, humor, and storytelling, and communicates openly with parents when challenges arise. Teacher 3 sees emotional regulation as essential, maintaining professionalism even during difficult moments. She also understands her role as culturally sensitive and care-oriented, avoiding taboo topics and affirming learners through encouragement and shared experiences.

Teacher 3: Personal Experiential Themes

- **Experiencing Adaptive Instruction Through Continuous Responsiveness to Learner Needs and Feedback**
- **Bringing the Virtual Classroom to Life Through Multimodal and Interactive Pedagogical Strategies**
- **Integrating Technology as an Extension of Pedagogical Practice in One-to-One Online Instruction**
- **Sustaining Professional Presence Under Conditions of Constant Evaluation and Performance Visibility**
- **Managing Emotional Labor to Maintain Professionalism in Individualized Online Teaching Contexts**
- **Shaping Teacher Identity Through Role-Shifting Across Diverse Learner Expectations**
- **Navigating Cultural Sensitivity and Boundary-Management in Linguistically Diverse Online Interactions**

Teacher 4. She views one-on-one online EFL teaching as a responsive and learner-driven practice, changing her methods based on the age, skill level, and goals of each student. To help beginners learn a language, her lessons focus on structured review, spelling, and repetition. She uses TPR, visual aids, and digital tools like YouTube and Google Images to help students understand. When students have trouble answering, she talks to their parents and changes her methods by using translation and technology. She lowers the difficulty of assessments and slows down the pace when necessary to make sure learners understand. She considers her job as both teaching and providing emotional support, putting mood, motivation, and learner readiness first. She is culturally aware and respectful; hence she doesn't talk about things that are taboo and makes sure her teaching meets the expectations of parents and the platform's management.

Teacher 4. Personal Experiential Themes

- **Experiencing instruction as shaped by learners' immediate responses during the lesson**
- **Continuously adjusting teaching approaches to address differences in learners' language level, pace, and participation**
- **Experiencing the effort to make meaning clear and visible within the limits of the online environment**
- **Experiencing tension between preferred teaching practices and the conditions of online instruction**
- **Working within interpersonal and structural limits that influence instructional decisions**
- **Experiencing responsibility for learners' emotional engagement and behavior beyond language instruction**

Teacher 5. She views effective one-to-one online EFL teaching as a flexible, learner-centered practice shaped by rapport, language grading, and real-time adjustments. Teacher 5 adapts her strategies to match learner proficiency and interests, simplifying content and modifying lessons to maintain engagement. She responds to common challenges, like internet issues or student disengagement, by shifting approaches, using repetition, humor, and emotional support. As an online Teacher, she moves between being a guide, a model, and a companion, depending on each learner's level and cultural context.

Teacher 5. Personal Experiential Themes

- **Relying on the learner's response to know how the lesson should unfold**
- **Experiencing adjustment as calibrating instructional support to learners' readiness and participation**
- **Experiencing the lesson space as culturally and materially mediated in the online environment**
- **Sustaining learning amid instability in the online teaching environment**
- **Experiencing disruption as requiring pedagogical flexibility and relational care**
- **Teaching as shaped by multiple contextual demands that influence instructional decisions**
- **Experiencing linguistic diversity as recognizing the learner's identity within the teaching interaction.**

Teacher 6. She views effective one-to-one online EFL teaching as an adaptive, learner-centered practice shaped by age, proficiency, and engagement strategies. She adjusts her approach using visual tools, simplified instructions, and flexible lesson flow to maintain focus and support comprehension. She addresses challenges such as low motivation, cultural sensitivities, and limited proficiency by responding with empathy, adapting materials, and scaffolding learning with clear commands and phonics. Her strategies emphasize emotional support, respect, and clarity. As a tutor, Teacher 6 shifts between being a guide, motivator, and cultural mediator, depending on the learner's background and needs. She values connection, often using native language phrases and humor to build trust.

Teacher 6. Personal Experiential Themes

- **Navigating instruction through ongoing sensitivity to learners' moment-to-moment understanding**
- **Drawing on multimodal and interactive strategies to maintain attention and clarify meaning in the online environment**
- **Shaping flexible lesson flow while working within institutional lesson structures**
- **Working through institutional, linguistic, and content-related constraints that influence instructional choices**
- **Responding to emotional cues to maintain learner engagement during instructional difficulties**
- **Positioning teaching as relational practice grounded in trust-building and emotional connection**
- **Taking on the role of guide and creator of a safe space for culturally and linguistically diverse learners**

Teacher 7. He views effective one-to-one online EFL teaching as a flexible, learner-driven process shaped by students' age, proficiency level, and interests. He adapts his lessons using visual aids, rewards, simplified language, and personalized pacing to sustain engagement and ensure understanding. He addresses challenges such as low motivation, behavioral issues, and mismatched lesson content by staying calm, negotiating content, and adjusting strategies to fit learner needs. His methods emphasize empathy, responsiveness, and cultural sensitivity. Teacher 7 alternates between being a facilitator, motivator, and cultural bridge, carefully balancing institutional expectations with student preferences.

Teacher 7. Personal Experiential Themes

- **Experiencing learner-oriented practice shaped by continuous attention to individual needs in online instruction**
- **Finding stability through structure while remaining open to moment-to-moment instructional adjustments**
- **Experiencing growth through seeking support, exchanging strategies, and learning with peers**
- **Maintaining emotional control to preserve lesson continuity and classroom stability**
- **Experiencing cultural differences that shape communication, participation, and expectations.**
- **Demonstrating respect through cultural awareness and sensitivity in instructional interaction**
- **Supporting meaningful learning by connecting instruction to learners' cultural backgrounds**

Report of All Participants Findings

Upon completing the thematic analysis of each tutor six super-ordinate themes were identified. These themes directly address the research questions and reflect the lived experiences of Filipino EFL tutors who conduct one-to-one synchronous online English lessons with culturally and linguistically diverse foreign learners.

Super-ordinate Themes

1. Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors emphasized feeling the need to continuously adjust themselves in response to learners' participation, understanding, and pace in real time.
2. Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors highlighted the effort of actively sustaining learners' attention and involvement within the limits of the virtual classroom environment.
3. Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors acknowledged the felt importance of building connection in order to maintain meaningful one-to-one interaction.
4. Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors recognized working within platform rules, lesson structures, and time limits as shaping how they make instructional decisions.
5. Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors emphasized gradually becoming more confident and adaptive through repeated exposure to varied teaching situations.
6. Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors underscored becoming more aware of cultural differences as influencing how they communicate, respond, and relate to learners.

DISCUSSION

This section presents the discussion of the findings based on the personal experiential themes of the seven Filipino EFL tutors; the analysis identifies six super-ordinate themes. These themes capture key aspects of one-to-one synchronous online English instruction

Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors emphasized feeling the need to continuously adjust themselves in response to learners' participation, understanding, and pace in real time. The findings demonstrate that Filipino tutors experience one-to-one synchronous online teaching as requiring constant attentiveness to learners' immediate responses, where they continuously recalibrate how they explain, pace, and sequence instruction. Tutors feel the need to adjust themselves when learners show hesitation, confusion, or confidence, indicating that responsiveness operates as an ongoing process rather than an occasional strategy. This study shows that adaptation is experienced as a condition of sustaining interaction, particularly in individualized lessons where learner participation directly influences lesson flow. Hrastinski et al. (2024) similarly identify pedagogical flexibility as a principled response to learner readiness, supporting the tutors' emphasis on adjusting instruction to maintain comprehension rather than strictly following pre-designed materials.

The present study demonstrates that tutors experience responsiveness as closely tied to interpreting learner participation as it unfolds in real time. Tutors observe silence, short responses, or active engagement as signals guiding how much support or challenge is appropriate. Munaji et al. (2024) similarly report that adaptive teachers modify explanations and learning tasks based on learner feedback, suggesting convergence between the tutors' experiences and existing research on responsive pedagogy. However, this study further highlights the intensity of such responsiveness in one-to-one online contexts, where tutors cannot rely on peer interaction to sustain lesson flow. The tutors' experiences show that responsiveness becomes continuous because interaction depends entirely on the learner's willingness and ability to participate.

The findings also show that tutors experience themselves adjusting differently depending on learner proficiency. They simplify explanations, segment instructions, and guide responses when learners struggle, while extending discussion when learners demonstrate confidence. Shirley (2025) similarly emphasizes differentiated input and targeted questioning as supporting learner engagement. Balalle (2024) notes that participation in digital environments is influenced by learner confidence and preparedness, reinforcing tutors' accounts of adjusting themselves to sustain interaction. A key difference highlighted in this study is that tutors experience responsiveness not only as instructional differentiation but also as managing participation within limited 25-minute sessions, where decisions must occur quickly without interrupting lesson continuity.

The study further demonstrates that tutors experience lesson structures as orienting frameworks that support but do not determine their actions. Tutors rely on routines such as warm-ups and guided tasks, yet feel the need to modify pacing and explanations when learners encounter difficulty. Åkerfeldt et al. (2023) explain that flexible education often occurs within structured environments, which aligns with tutors' experiences of balancing responsiveness with required lesson sequences. Ho and Allieu (2024) also show that adjusting instructional pacing improves learner understanding. However, the tutors' experiences emphasize the immediacy of these adjustments, suggesting that flexibility in one-to-one online teaching involves continuous micro-level decision-making shaped by learners' moment-to-moment responses.

The tutors' experiences reveal how responsiveness is lived as sustained attentional effort toward interpreting learner cues and recalibrating instructional actions accordingly. The tutors' narratives highlight how this continuous adjustment becomes internalized as part of professional awareness developed through repeated exposure to diverse learners. This suggests that in one-to-one online environments, tutors experience themselves as continually repositioning their instructional actions in response to learners' evolving understanding, revealing responsiveness as both a pedagogical process and an experiential orientation toward supporting meaningful participation.

Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors highlighted the effort of actively sustaining learners' attention and involvement within the limits of the virtual classroom environment. The findings of this study demonstrate that Filipino tutors experience engagement in one-to-one synchronous online teaching as something they must actively sustain through continuous attentiveness to learners' responsiveness and participation. Rather than assuming that learners will remain attentive throughout the lesson, tutors experience the need to monitor interaction closely and adjust their communicative actions when signs of hesitation, silence, or distraction emerge. Engagement is therefore experienced as ongoing effort shaped by the constraints of screen-mediated communication. This aligns with Bond (2020) and Martin et al. (2020), who report that participation in synchronous online environments often requires deliberate facilitation because learners may demonstrate reduced spontaneous interaction. Similar to these studies, the tutors experience engagement not as a fixed outcome of lesson design but as a condition that must be continuously supported through responsive interaction.

The study further demonstrates that tutors experience the absence of shared physical space as intensifying the need to actively sustain interaction. Because only one learner is present, silence or reduced responsiveness becomes immediately noticeable and affects lesson continuity. Tutors feel the need to respond quickly to maintain communication flow and prevent disengagement. Lowenthal et al. (2020) similarly emphasize that synchronous online teaching requires active management of turn-taking and response patterns to maintain participation. However, this study highlights a distinct feature of one-to-one contexts, where tutors experience engagement as more fragile because interaction depends entirely on one learner's willingness to respond. This suggests that sustaining attention becomes a continuous interactional effort shaped by the immediacy of individualized online communication.

Tutors also experience sustained attentiveness as necessary for detecting subtle changes in learners' participation. They monitor response timing, verbal output, and visible cues that indicate shifts in attention or comprehension. Borup et al. (2020) and Martin et al. (2020) similarly report that online learners are more prone to distraction and require active facilitation to maintain involvement. The present findings extend these studies by showing that tutors experience attentional monitoring not only as pedagogical awareness but also as ongoing effort to stabilize interaction within short sessions. Engagement therefore becomes closely tied to how tutors perceive and respond to fluctuating learner presence in real time.

Within these interactional demands, the study demonstrates that tutors experience multimodal and digital resources as practical means of sustaining learner involvement. Tutors combine speech with gestures, facial expression, vocal variation, visual materials, and digital tools to maintain attention and support understanding. Muntaha et al. (2024) similarly highlight how multimodal communication strengthens attentional engagement in online interaction. Martin et al. (2020) also note that visual scaffolding enhances participation by making communication more dynamic, while Borup et al. (2020) show that interactive digital features can reinforce responsiveness and sustain dialogue. These similarities suggest that tutors' efforts to sustain engagement reflect broader patterns in synchronous online pedagogy, although this study shows that such practices are experienced as necessary rather than supplementary in one-to-one environments.

The tutors' experiences highlight how sustaining engagement involves continuous attentional effort toward maintaining interaction within technological constraints. The findings emphasize that engagement is experienced as something actively shaped through multimodal communication and interactional responsiveness rather than solely through instructional content. This reflection suggests that in individualized online contexts, tutors experience themselves as continuously working to sustain learner presence, revealing engagement as an ongoing relational and interactional accomplishment shaped by the limits of the virtual classroom environment.

Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors acknowledged the felt importance of building connection in order to maintain meaningful one-to-one interaction. The findings of this study demonstrate that Filipino tutors experience one-to-one synchronous online teaching as requiring continuous attention to relational connection in order to sustain learners' participation and confidence. Tutors do not experience

teaching as limited to delivering content; rather, they feel responsible for creating a supportive interactional environment where learners feel comfortable speaking and responding. This emphasis on connection aligns with Mercer and Dörnyei (2020), who highlight the role of positive teacher–student relationships in strengthening learner confidence and persistence. Similarly, Xie et al. (2022) found that emotional support predicts higher participation and satisfaction in synchronous online language learning, supporting the tutors’ emphasis on relational attentiveness as shaping learners’ willingness to communicate.

This study further demonstrates that tutors experience one-to-one online contexts as intensifying the need to sustain connection because learners rely solely on the tutor for reassurance. Without peer interaction to distribute participation, tutors feel the need to respond immediately to hesitation and uncertainty in order to maintain lesson continuity. Richardson et al. (2017) similarly show that instructor presence and responsiveness increase learners’ confidence and reduce anxiety in online environments. While these studies emphasize the importance of supportive communication in online learning, the present findings highlight how tutors experience this responsibility more strongly in individualized lessons, where relational connection directly influences whether interaction continues or stops.

Tutors also experience trust-building as gradual and sustained through repeated interaction across sessions. They provide reassurance when learners make mistakes and emphasize effort rather than accuracy to encourage continued participation. Wang et al. (2023) show that supportive feedback reduces anxiety and increases persistence in language learning, which is consistent with tutors’ experiences of encouraging learners through affirming responses and gentle correction. Zhang et al. (2024) similarly note that supportive teacher behaviors increase willingness to communicate, reinforcing tutors’ sense that reassurance is necessary to sustain interaction. However, this study highlights that tutors experience reassurance not as occasional encouragement but as continuous relational work embedded in everyday communication.

The findings further demonstrate that tutors experience emotional regulation as part of sustaining meaningful interaction. Tutors monitor their tone, expressions, and responses in order to maintain a supportive atmosphere even when learners show resistance, frustration, or hesitation. Mercer and Gregersen (2020) emphasize that teachers’ emotional regulation supports learner motivation and persistence, while Martin et al. (2020) highlight the need for instructors to shift interactional roles to maintain engagement in online learning environments. Richardson et al. (2017) also show that emotionally responsive teaching strengthens learner confidence. The tutors’ experiences show similarities with these studies but also reveal how emotional regulation is experienced as continuous relational responsibility in one-to-one teaching, where interaction depends heavily on the tutor’s ability to maintain emotional stability.

The tutors’ experiences highlight how sustaining meaningful interaction involves ongoing sensitivity to learners’ emotional responses and willingness to participate. The findings emphasize that tutors experience relational work as inseparable from instructional practice, requiring continuous adjustment of tone, encouragement, and interactional stance. This reflection suggests that in one-to-one online environments, tutors experience themselves as responsible for maintaining the interpersonal conditions that allow learning to occur, highlighting connection as an essential element in sustaining participation and meaningful communication.

Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors recognized working within platform rules, lesson structures, and time limits as shaping how they make instructional decisions.

The findings of this study demonstrate that Filipino tutors experience one-to-one synchronous online teaching as situated within institutional and technological conditions that influence how they manage pacing, interaction, and instructional choices. Tutors recognize that lesson delivery does not occur independently of the platform but is shaped by pre-designed materials, structured lesson sequences, and time restrictions. These structural elements influence how tutors interpret their role and make decisions during live interaction. Trust and Whalen (2020) similarly emphasize that digital platforms shape instructional possibilities by organizing communication channels, lesson formats, and time allocation. This alignment suggests that tutors experience teaching as embedded within technological systems that guide how instruction unfolds.

The study also demonstrates that tutors experience platform design as structuring lesson flow and limiting autonomy over sequencing and pacing. Tutors often follow pre-arranged slides and required activities that influence how content is presented and how interaction progresses. Moorhouse and Kohnke (2021) similarly report that platform-based courseware standardizes instructional processes and constrains teacher flexibility. These similarities indicate that tutors experience instructional decision-making as negotiated within institutional frameworks rather than fully self-directed. However, this study highlights that tutors feel the need to continuously interpret how much adaptation is possible while maintaining alignment with platform expectations, suggesting that responsiveness occurs within structured boundaries.

Tutors further recognize that institutional expectations and evaluation systems influence how they prioritize lesson completion and interactional pacing. Performance metrics, learner ratings, and lesson completion requirements shape how tutors allocate time and manage participation. Williamson et al. (2020) note that accountability systems in online education often influence teachers' instructional priorities by emphasizing measurable outcomes. Similarly, Trust and Whalen (2021) show that compressed lesson formats limit opportunities for extended interaction, supporting tutors' experiences of working within fixed 25-minute sessions. While these studies emphasize structural influence, the present findings demonstrate that tutors experience these conditions as shaping their moment-to-moment decisions about whether to extend explanation or proceed with required lesson progression.

Technological affordances also shape how tutors experience interactional continuity. Connectivity interruptions, limited platform tools, and structured transitions affect how clearly explanations are delivered and how smoothly communication unfolds. Martin et al. (2020) highlight how technological conditions influence participation patterns in synchronous online learning, supporting tutors' accounts of adjusting instruction when communication disruptions occur. Tutors also describe negotiating these constraints by simplifying explanations or modifying activities to maintain lesson flow. Hasan (2025) similarly notes that teachers often balance institutional expectations with pedagogical priorities, suggesting convergence between tutors' experiences and broader research on adaptive decision-making within structured environments.

The tutors' experiences highlight how instructional decision-making is shaped by the need to continuously interpret platform expectations while maintaining responsiveness to learners' needs. The findings emphasize that tutors experience institutional conditions not only as constraints but also as contextual factors that guide professional judgment about pacing, communication, and lesson direction. This suggests that tutors experience themselves as working within boundaries that influence how they adapt instruction, revealing how professional decision-making develops through continuous negotiation between pedagogical intention and structural conditions in one-to-one online teaching environments.

Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors emphasized gradually becoming more confident and adaptive through repeated exposure to varied teaching situations. The findings of this study demonstrate that Filipino tutors experience professional growth as emerging through continuous engagement with diverse learners, repeated instructional encounters, and ongoing adjustment to new teaching demands. Tutors emphasize that competence does not develop instantly but evolves gradually as they encounter varied learner needs, participation patterns, and lesson challenges. Rather than viewing expertise as fixed, tutors experience themselves as progressively becoming more confident in managing instructional decisions and responding to unpredictable classroom situations. This aligns with Trust et al. (2018) and Philipsen et al. (2019), who highlight that professional learning in online teaching often develops through sustained engagement with practice rather than through formal training alone. Similar to these studies, the tutors experience growth as embedded in everyday teaching activity.

The present study also demonstrates that tutors experience one-to-one online environments as accelerating professional learning because each lesson presents different communicative and pedagogical demands. Tutors describe needing to respond quickly to learners with varying proficiency levels, communication styles, and expectations, which encourages continuous adaptation. Philipsen et al. (2019) similarly explain that online teaching environments promote adaptive expertise through ongoing problem-solving and reflective practice.

The tutors' experiences support this view, as they describe gradually recognizing patterns in learner behavior and adjusting strategies more efficiently over time. However, this study highlights that such adaptation is experienced as immediate and continuous due to the individualized nature of one-to-one lessons, where tutors must independently manage instructional challenges without peer classroom support.

The findings further show that tutors experience confidence as developing cumulatively through repeated exposure to similar instructional situations. As tutors encounter recurring challenges, they refine explanations, pacing, and questioning strategies, which gradually reduces uncertainty. Trust et al. (2018) similarly note that confidence develops through iterative practice and reflection, reinforcing the tutors' sense that competence strengthens through experience. Moorhouse and Kohnke (2021) also emphasize the importance of experiential learning in developing expertise in online teaching contexts. While these studies emphasize professional development broadly, this study highlights that tutors experience increased confidence as closely linked to their ability to respond more quickly and appropriately to learner needs within limited session time.

Tutors also experience professional growth through reflection, peer interaction, and engagement with feedback. They reflect on lesson effectiveness, reconsider instructional decisions, and adjust future teaching approaches accordingly. Philipson et al. (2019) emphasize reflective practice as central to teacher learning, which aligns with tutors' accounts of reviewing questioning strategies, pacing, and explanations after lessons. Tutors also learn through interaction with colleagues, sharing strategies and discussing classroom challenges. Trust et al. (2018) similarly highlight collaborative professional learning as strengthening teaching confidence in online environments. Tutors further describe using learner feedback to guide improvement, while still interpreting feedback critically. This aligns with Philipson et al. (2019), who emphasize that professional learning depends on teachers' active engagement with feedback rather than passive compliance.

The tutors' experiences highlight how confidence develops through repeated exposure to varied instructional situations that gradually strengthen professional judgment. The findings emphasize that tutors experience professional growth as closely connected to how they interpret challenges and refine responses over time. This suggests that tutors experience themselves as gradually becoming more confident not through isolated training but through sustained participation in everyday teaching situations, where repeated adjustment and reflection shape their evolving sense of competence in one-to-one online environments.

Upon reflecting on their experiences, the Filipino tutors underscored becoming more aware of cultural differences as influencing how they communicate, respond, and relate to learners. The findings of this study demonstrate that Filipino tutors experience one-to-one synchronous online teaching as requiring continuous awareness of cultural differences that shape interaction, participation, and interpretation of learner behavior. Tutors encounter learners with varied communication styles, expectations about teacher authority, and preferences for feedback, prompting them to adjust how they ask questions, give explanations, and manage interaction. Rather than applying uniform instructional approaches, tutors become more attentive to how cultural background influences learners' responses and willingness to participate. Schirmer and Lockman (2022) similarly emphasize that culturally responsive teaching involves adjusting communication and pedagogy to align with learners' backgrounds, supporting the tutors' experiences of adapting interaction to sustain meaningful communication.

The present study further demonstrates that tutors experience cultural responsiveness as an ongoing interpretive process shaped through repeated interaction with diverse learners. Tutors become more attentive to differences in classroom participation patterns, noticing that some learners expect structured guidance while others respond more comfortably to open discussion. Bagea (2023) similarly reports that culturally responsive instruction improves participation when teaching aligns with learners' expectations and prior educational experiences. While these findings show similarity, this study highlights that tutors experience cultural responsiveness not only as pedagogical adjustment but also as ongoing attentiveness to how learners interpret communication cues in real time.

Tutors also experience cultural awareness as influencing how they manage correction, questioning style, and conversational pacing. They recognize that some learners prefer direct feedback while others respond more

positively to indirect prompts. Moorhouse and Kohnke (2021) note that intercultural competence develops through sustained interaction with learners from different backgrounds, which aligns with tutors' narratives of gradually recognizing patterns in learner communication and participation. The findings show that tutors experience cultural learning as cumulative, where repeated exposure helps them anticipate learner preferences and adjust interaction more confidently.

The study also demonstrates that tutors experience cultural awareness as shaping how examples and explanations are selected. Tutors adapt references, topics, and illustrations to align with learners' everyday experiences, helping learners connect new language to familiar contexts. Schirmer and Lockman (2022) show that culturally relevant examples support comprehension by linking instruction to learners' prior knowledge, reinforcing tutors' experiences of modifying materials to support understanding. Moorhouse and Kohnke (2021) further explain that intercultural competence develops gradually through repeated cross-cultural encounters, which aligns with tutors' narratives of becoming more attentive to cultural differences over time. These similarities suggest that tutors experience cultural responsiveness as grounded in ongoing interaction rather than predetermined cultural knowledge.

The tutors' experiences highlight how awareness of cultural differences develops through continuous interaction with learners from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The findings emphasize that tutors experience cultural awareness as an evolving sensitivity that informs how they communicate and relate to learners rather than as fixed knowledge about particular cultures. This suggests that tutors experience themselves as continuously learning how to interpret and respond to cultural variation in real time, highlighting intercultural awareness as an ongoing dimension of professional practice in one-to-one online teaching environments.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that one-to-one synchronous online EFL teaching is a dynamic professional experience shaped by continuous adjustment to learners' participation, understanding, pace, and cultural background. Filipino tutors experience teaching as requiring sustained attentiveness to learners' responses while actively maintaining engagement within the limits of screen-mediated interaction. Building relational connection plays an essential role in supporting learner confidence and participation, while institutional structures, platform requirements, and time limits shape how tutors make instructional decisions. Through repeated exposure to diverse teaching situations, tutors gradually become more confident, adaptive, and aware of how cultural differences influence communication and interaction.

The findings demonstrate that tutors' experiences reflect key principles of Constructivist Learning Theory, the Community of Inquiry Framework, Reflective Practice, and Sociocultural perspectives of learning. Similar to these theories, tutors experience teaching as socially mediated, interaction-driven, and continuously shaped through reflection and adaptation. While previous studies emphasize instructional flexibility and online engagement, this study highlights how tutors personally experience the need to adjust themselves, regulate emotions, and sustain interaction in individualized online environments. These experiences show that effective one-to-one online EFL teaching involves adaptive expertise, relational attentiveness, emotional regulation, and intercultural awareness developed through sustained practice.

Based on these findings, teacher preparation programs and online education providers may strengthen tutor readiness by supporting adaptive instruction, affective engagement, reflective practice, and culturally responsive communication. Training that integrates pedagogical use of digital tools, feedback strategies, and opportunities for collaborative learning may enhance tutors' confidence and instructional responsiveness. Institutional support systems that recognize the relational and emotional dimensions of online teaching may further help tutors sustain meaningful interaction with learners.

Future research may examine how these experiential dimensions develop across different online platforms, cultural contexts, and instructional settings. Studies may also explore how training programs influence tutors'

adaptive skills, emotional competence, and intercultural communication. Expanding research beyond online EFL teaching may also provide insights into other professions that require relational and cross-cultural interaction in digital environments.

Overall, this study highlights that one-to-one online EFL teaching is not only a technical instructional task but also an experiential process that involves continuous adjustment, relational engagement, professional growth, and cultural awareness. Through sustained interaction and reflective practice, Filipino tutors contribute significantly to meaningful language learning experiences in global online education.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from the EFL tutors prior to their participation in the study. The tutors voluntarily signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF) after receiving a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation. The EFL tutors were approached directly because they are independent service providers and do not have an employer–employee relationship with any company they work with

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