

Problematizing the Commodification of ESL Teaching in the Philippines: Mediating Expectations, Norms and Identity(ies)

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Abstract

As the third largest nation of English speakers, the Philippines has become a popular destination for English language learning, especially for people in South East Asia. Yet, however you dress up popularity, we have to look beyond the headlines and see what kind of narrative is being constructed. A closer examination of detailed empirical evidence from published research studies highlights issues that are often glossed over in newspaper headlines. This paper discusses the problems concerning the commodification of English language teaching in the Philippines, that is, cost factors, learner expectations and satisfaction on the courses and quality of teaching, Filipino teachers' (FTs) pronunciation and the Philippine English (PhE) accent vis-a-vis the native speaker norms, and their ramifications on pedagogy and other users of wider sociolinguistic significance. Recommendations for stakeholders will be provided.

Keywords: ESL in the Philippines, problematization, commodification, Philippine English

Introduction

Some may argue that the dominance of the English language is a result of Western imperialism (cf. Phillipson, 1992) and/or globalization (cf. Crystal, 2003), but it is undeniable that English has become a global tool of communication and international trade. The UK and the US, being the main alleged culprits of this pervasive linguistic spread, are also the instigators of foreign influence throughout the globe. In today's world, proficiency in English is the pinnacle of academic and professional achievement and, for some, this may also lead to personal happiness. As the third most spoken language in the world (Ethnologue, 2018) and as "the language of diplomacy, business and popular culture", it is undeniable that English is the "world's language" (World Economic Forum, 2017, para. 1). Hence, it is not surprising that the English language teaching (ELT) industry has become a multi-billion dollar business (British Council, 2006; Reuters, 2018), and the market for English as a commodified language continues to grow.

According to Baker (2017), the ELT industry has "to a large extent been based around the centrality of Anglophone, mainly UK and US, versions of "standard" English, and this "idealized model of the native speaker" is often

perceived “as the benchmark for all language learners” (p. 54). This makes the UK and the US the “major ELT destinations” followed by Australia and Canada (ICEF Monitor, 2015; International Association of Language Centers (IALC), 2016). Language Centers promoting the UK, for instance, claim that the best way to learn English is “in its native country” (gostudylink.net, n.d.) as it is “the home of English” (vivamundo.com, 2018) where international students will be surrounded by native speakers. Being immersed in the language and culture is also one of the reasons why students prefer to go to the US to study. Although the UK and US still have the biggest market share in terms of learner preference as study destinations, the UK, in particular, has suffered a slight setback in recent years. This loss in market share can be attributed to rising costs and shorter course length (ICEF Monitor, 2016a). For the same fee, or even lower, international students can have longer study periods in other study destinations such as the Philippines; thereby stretching their dollar a little bit more.

Why the Philippines? Aside from the fact that English is an official language of the country, it is widely spoken by the majority, and it is used in business, education, media, and government communications (Bernardo, 2004; Friginal, 2007). According to the ICEF Monitor (2016b), with roughly 100 million speakers (more than the UK and 93.5% of Filipinos can speak and understand English), the Philippines “is positioning itself as a reputable education centre for English language learners” (para. 2). The ICEF Monitor (2015) adds that Korean and Japanese students are drawn to study in the Philippines due to the geographical “proximity and exceptional value relative to traditional ELT destinations” (para. 2). Claiming to be the world’s third largest English-speaking country, after the US and the UK, the Philippines’ Department of Tourism (DOT) is heavily tapping into the ELT market and building the country’s niche as the place-to-go for ESL learning. As shown in one of their 2017 press releases promoting Philippine ESL and its fine beaches to the Koreans, the DOT proudly claims that “ESL training is more fun in the PHL” (DOT, 2017).

The large number of English speakers and the use of English as a medium of instruction in various courses and programs in the Philippines are key factors, and as UNESCO in a report on student mobility in Asia states (UNESCO, 2013), “the relatively low cost of living and affordable tuition and other school fees” is also “one of the strongest drivers of inbound mobility”; thus making the Philippines a popular destination for English language learning.

A search about learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in the Philippines on Google reveals a long list of media coverage-related results that seem to suggest a common sales pitch used to describe the country as an increasingly popular destination for English language learning, especially for people in/from South East Asia. Yet, however you dress up popularity, one has to look beyond the headlines to see what kind of narrative is being constructed. These are examples of the labels used to frame EFL/ESL/ELT in the Philippines as a “cheap” alternative: The world’s budget English teacher; bargain for high quality and affordable education; less expensive, low-cost English teacher to

the world? The connotations suggest that the Philippines is offering something that is poorly made, second-best, perhaps even an imitation of the real thing; something better. Focusing on the benefits without any reference to (the low) financial costs, the Philippines can and does provide high quality education/learning, albeit with an “American accent”; indeed, the country offers a place/context where English is spoken almost everywhere, in a variety of surroundings where EFL learners are widely exposed to the target language, and where they can use it in meaningful, real-world situations. This means that they are able to converse with genuine “native” speakers, watch films and television shows, read authentic English materials, learn English through art, music, and other cultural forms; thereby enhancing their proficiency as they are provided with an array of opportunities to both learn and to practice English in a 'natural' (cf. Krashen & Terrell, 1983) setting. Does all this sound too good to be true?

A brief look at academic research studies may or may not tell us a different story. While some of these studies discussed in the following section seem to confirm a few of the informal/subjective conclusions (economical, geographical proximity, etc.) presented by journalists, a closer examination of detailed empirical evidence from published research studies highlights issues that are often glossed over in newspaper headlines

This paper will present and discuss these issues viz., cost factors, learner expectations, course satisfaction, quality of teaching, Filipino teachers' (FTs) pronunciation, the Philippine English (PhE) accent vis-à-vis native speaker norms, and their ramifications on pedagogy and other users of wider sociolinguistic significance. Finally, recommendations for teachers, learners, EFL/ESL stakeholders, and the Philippine government will be provided.

Cost factors

Labeled as “the world’s low-cost English language teacher” (McGeown, 2012, para. 1), the Philippines wholeheartedly embraces this title with pride and enthusiasm. Capitalizing on a low-price strategy, the Philippines markets its EFL industry at a competitive price, this has undoubtedly enhanced the demand among potential consumers - mainly Koreans, Japanese, Taiwanese, and many others who come from the expanding circle (cf. Kachru, 1992) countries.

But how affordable are these ESL programs and where are they offered? In 2012, tuition fee rates were approximately US \$500 per course - based on about 60 hours class contact (McGeown, 2012). By 2016, a similar course cost between US \$800 to \$1,600 inclusive of accommodation and meals (ICEF, 2016b). Despite the increase in fees, these courses are still relatively economical in comparison to what they would cost for a similar course in America. In addition to lower course fees, the modest cost of living in the Philippines is also a significant factor that lures foreign students. For price conscious students, the ability to stretch a dollar can be a deal breaker when choosing their study destination. Geographical proximity to their home country and low-priced travel costs are also important considerations. A direct flight from Korea or

Japan to Manila is less than 4 hours, and Taiwan is even nearer taking only two hours. So, return flights are around US \$250 to 400.

The motivation to learn English can be attributed to a desire to have better future career prospects to gaining social status in their home country (Mackey, 2014; Johnson, 2009). However, affordability of ESL programs is often the key determinant for choosing the Philippines over traditional study destinations (ICEF, 2016a; McGeown, 2012, Satake, 2015; WENR, 2018). Kobayashi's (2008) qualitative study, using an open-ended survey questionnaire, which looked at foreign (Taiwanese) students' impressions about their learning experiences in the Philippines, and the results he gathered, reinforce the fact that costs are largely influential in their decision to study in the Philippines. Kobayashi states that students "regarded the Philippines as a cheap substitute for such study destinations as Canada or the US" (p. 86).

A similar investigation conducted by Ozaki (2011) also obtained comparable results, and pointed out that lower travel costs and tuition fees in the Philippines did encourage foreign students to "take more lessons or study for a longer period of time" (p. 54). Ozaki added that "the average cost for an hour one-to-one lesson...was only US \$7.25" compared with the US\$ 87.93 demanded in Sydney, Australia (Ozaki, 2011). He also surmised that "the low rates for private lessons enable students to learn English intensively and efficiently even when they remain in the country for only a short period" (p. 54).

Choe and Son (2017) also came up with the same findings from semi-structured interviews with Korean parents' reasons for sending their children to Southeast Asian ESL countries, viz. the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia. Aside from the low cost of living and affordable education as the primary reasons, they also reported that the Philippines was also "considered by the parents to be the best place for both emotional and academic adjustment" (p. 66)

Pedagogical factors

While EFL course fees in the Philippines are considered more economical, some English language providers in the country are not shy from claiming that they are offering top quality learning facilities as they provide small group instruction which lasts from 8 to 12 hours per week (Cabrera, 2012; Taipei Times, 2017). The adoption of English as the medium of instruction (EMI) and an English-only learning environment are also used as part of their marketing pitch (Ozaki, 2011).

The findings of Ozaki's (2017) small-scale (n=19) pilot study using a survey questionnaire on learners' views of Filipino EFL teachers' expertise (i.e., language abilities, instructional skills, and knowledge of English), also reveals a favorable response which suggests that the Filipino teachers (FTs) from a private university were perceived to be exceptionally competent EFL teachers. Ozaki (2017) noted that the FTs' language skills were evaluated "highly", and

he surmised that the Philippines being in the outer circle (cf. Kachru, 1992), “where English is used as an official, second, and/or educational language on a daily basis” (n.p.), explains why the FTs have a good grasp of English language skills. However, merely possessing good grammatical skills does not often equate to excellent pronunciation skills. Ozaki posits that students’ low ratings on FTs’ pronunciation and speaking skills can be attributed to their view that good pronunciation is having a native-like (sic.) pronunciation, which he argues is similar to Butler’s findings (2007 in Ozaki, 2017) that Korean students’ notion of exceptional English pronunciation is akin to American-accented English. The FTs’ heavy Philippine-English (PhE) accent and their use of local idiomatic expressions, were both given a low evaluation. This can be attributed to the learners’ familiarity with native English teachers’ use of colloquialisms and their lack of exposure to PhE linguistic features and phrasal expressions (Dita & De Leon, 2017; Ozaki, 2017).

Kobayashi’s (2008) research participants also voiced the same concerns that “Filipino teachers are good, but not their accent” and that they “would have preferred that teachers had an L1 accent” (p. 90). The learners also viewed the disparity in accent negatively and commented on the differences in pronunciation, for example rolled “r” sounds and the unaspirated /p/ which sounded like a /b/ to them, sometimes caused communication breakdown and misunderstanding. In spite of the learners’ criticisms about PhE, FTs still received positive evaluation on their “pedagogical qualities such as willingness to adjust the pace to the learners’ level” (p. 93) and they fared well when compared with native teachers from the “inner circle”.

The qualitative study of de Guzman, Albela, Nieto, Ferrer and Santos (2006), using semi-structured interviews on the English language learning difficulties of Korean students, that examined the sociolinguistic competence, motivation and cultural factors that affected their learning, found a number of pedagogical factors that made class discussions difficult to understand for the Koreans. For example, they pointed out the following: FTs’ constant code-switching, the use of difficult words and vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, lack of fluency in English, fast pace in teaching, and use of topics Koreans cannot relate to (cf. Rosario & Narag-Maguddayao, 2017). They also noted some of the FTs’ teaching methodologies that the Koreans found problematic: no hand-outs, no group activities, and the emphasis on lecture-based learning (p. 155). De Guzman et al. (2006) posit that these pedagogical flaws in the classroom “complicate the subjects’ understanding of the lessons” (p. 155). One student was quoted saying:

... teachers can’t fully use the English and sometimes they sometimes speak English, sometimes speak Tagalog...ahh...they speak mix the language so, yeah, it makes me uh...understand hard...it makes me hard to understand. (p. 155).

Sociolinguistic factors

The research findings of Cruz and Pariña (2017) where they examined the implicit and explicit knowledge of Korean learners in the Philippines using a free written task and a grammaticality judgement test indicate that although the students found writing to be a daunting task, there was a positive influence on tapping into their background knowledge of grammar learned in their ESL classes. They concluded that this can be highly attributed to the ESL learning environment and its positive effect on the learning experiences of foreign students. Their findings share comparative results with the studies conducted by Cruz (2013) and Mamhot, Martin, and Masangya (2013). Cruz and Pariña (2017) also claim that the country's English speaking context is one that "the Philippines can offer", and that "apart from its English speaking culture, it is equipped with mechanisms that help develop the language skills of foreign students." (p. 83).

However, the subjects in Kobayashi's (2008) study noted the constant use of the Filipino language by the locals which made them feel that the learning environment was not entirely an English speaking one. Nonetheless, they still found the Philippines a good place to learn and use English because that is the only means of communicating with others; thus enhancing their sociolinguistic competence i.e. their ability to communicate using the target language (cf. Bayley & Regan, 2004; Holmes & Brown, 1976; Regan, Howard, & Lemée, 2009). The study conducted by de Guzman et al. (2006) also suggests that the Korean students used English "almost everywhere in the Philippines" (p. 154). One student was quoted as saying that there were more opportunities to speak English in the Philippines compared to Korea, while another student commented on the possibility to use all the four language skills – a far cry from the grammar-based style of learning in Korea. The participants in this study also remarked on the FTs' and Filipino classmates' pronunciation and accent that caused difficulties.

Unlike Ozaki's (2011, 2017) and Kobayashi's (2008) research participants, the Korean students in de Guzman et al.'s (2006) study recognized that both the Filipinos and Koreans have the same issues with accents and the constant use of code-switching pointed out that it was the primary reason why they were there (in the Philippines) in the first place—viz. to improve their English. The authors also posit that the Filipino students conversing in their vernacular in front of the Korean students are "instances when Filipinos commit language alternation" (p. 157) or code-switching - the shifting or switching from one language to another (cf. Auer, 1988; Bullock & Turibio, 2009), which they argued is common among bilingual speakers, and is predominant in bilingual societies such as the Philippines (Viduya, 2018).

According to Bautista (2004), the code-switching between Filipino/Tagalog and English is a kind of informal discourse among college-educated, middle/upper-class Filipinos living in urban areas. Sibayan (1985) argues that, "No discussion on the language situation in the Philippines today is

complete without a note on the mixing (mix-mix), or code-switching, from English to Filipino now becoming popularly known as Taglish” (p. 49), which has largely become fossilized in the Philippine conversational language. Some linguists view Fil-English code-switching as a form of additive bilingualism since it is regarded as a positive linguistic resource (Bautista, 2004), while others criticize it as a kind of subtractive bilingualism (cf. Lambert, 1975, cited in Landry & Allard, 1993, p. 4) whereby learning English has negative consequences on the first language, i.e. interference in successful learning of the Filipino language and culture (cf. Gonzalez & Sibayan, 1988). Sibayan (1985) speculated that Taglish will be modernized and intellectualized while lamenting the fact that “the development of Taglish is irreversible” (p. 50). More than 35 years later, this mix-mix (Taglish) used by bilingual Filipinos is still “deemed a *sine qua non* for effective communication” (Marasigan, 1986, pp. 340-341), and is considered the language of the youth (Nolasco, 2008).

For foreigners, however, Taglish is hard to comprehend, and for students learning English in the Philippines, the constant alternation can be overwhelmingly/seriously problematic (McGeown, 2012). Nevertheless, foreign students are lured to the Philippines by the low costs of education and the other perks the country has to offer. Although US and UK are still the preferred study destinations, the ICEF Monitor (2016b) reports, without providing justifications, that the “Philippines appears particularly well-placed to attract beginner ELT students” (p. 7). Perhaps if it is immersion in the target language students are after, and the chance to use the language in real life contexts, then the Philippines is good enough as it can genuinely deliver what this particular ELT market wants and needs.

Discussion

Based on the information presented above, the basic premise is that the Philippines has positioned itself as a low cost destination for English language learning. The main narrative is simple: the English courses the country offers are cheap; teaching and learning quality seems to follow second; the other study-holiday perquisites come in third. The rhetoric found in research studies, educational organizations’ marketing/propaganda and information released on government websites, through interviews of public figures and government representatives in the Philippines and abroad, newspaper publications, editorials, etc. all suggest a broader media discourse of ‘hybridity’ in the way ESL in the Philippines is promoted, practiced, and internalized/embodied. Drawing on Bhabha’s (1990) paradigm of postcolonial hybridity of cultures and the notion of “third space”, the following binaries can be challenged and deconstructed: low cost/quality ESL, authentic English/quasi-American English accent, Fil-Eng (Taglish)/standard English/PhE, and Filipino ESL teachers’ identity(ies) as (near) native speaker/ non-native speaker of English.

The problematization of the commodification of ESL in the Philippines is bounded by cultural and linguistic hybrid identities as perpetuated by media

exposure and representations. In the (re)construction of the national identity as an ESL provider, and in attempting to make sense of what it is about plus what it stands for, the Philippines needs to look at and reflect upon the media discourse as an identity mirror - bouncing back reflections of external interpretations as images of the country (Straus, 2017). It further needs to understand how it projects/promotes itself as a (re)source for ESL learning. In the end, the government, together with ESL providers, still needs to decide on how best it can deliver and satisfy the learning needs of the overseas ESL students.

The notion of low cost and quality ESL is a classic business marketing strategy that changes the nature of competition (Porter, 1989; Teece, 2010). The ESL sector has seen a growth in market share which suggests that the institutions involved are making a profit; something made possible by keeping the labor costs low with a ready supply of cheap labor and the ability to recruit teaching staff on a lower salary scheme. The economic strategy of the country as the supplier of a “large pool of cheap, English-speaking workers (McKay, 2004, p. 27)” is marked in its history (cf. Tupas & Salonga, 2016). While the Philippines can claim the legitimacy of “low cost”, how can it justify “quality ESL”? Can the country ever match the top quality standards that foreign students are clamoring for?

The studies cited in this paper expound on the issues concerning the quality of teaching/learning experienced by foreign students while pursuing ESL courses in the Philippines. Since data from the studies mostly come from foreign students enrolled on reputable university-based programs, it is not surprising that the overall feedback on FTs’ instructional skills is positive. However, the factors that received low ratings and negative comments given by the students are telltale signs of dissatisfaction. Foreign students are the consumer/clients - they are the ESL/EFL market, and any business book will contend the fact that as consumers they are “the ultimate arbiter of trade” (Johnson, 1988, p. 286). Curry (1985, p. 112), in his research study, maintains that “consumers clearly recognize differences in value” and therefore by “defining quality as value, allows one to compare widely disparate objects and experiences”. Grönroos (1990, p. 37) asserts that “it should always be remembered that what counts is quality as it is perceived by the customers”. Therefore, it is perceived value that counts, “where value equals perceived service quality relative to price” (Hallowell, 1996, p. 29). Thus, in (re)considering where the Philippines’ ESL market is at present and where it is heading, it would be highly sensible and pragmatic to keep these words in mind:

Quality is whatever the customers say it is, and the quality of a particular product or service is whatever the customer perceives it to be. (Buzzell, Gale, & Gale, 1987, p. 111)

The by-product of combining cheap and best is referred to as “a hybrid-‘affordable excellence’” (Garvin, 1988, p. 46). This value for money approach

seems to be the Philippines' ESL sales pitch. To capture the complicated relation between price and quality, imagine the kind of experience one would get from staying one night in a 5-star hotel in New York, or spending it at a youth hostel somewhere in Asia. Another similar comparison one can make out of the Philippines ESL industry's low cost sales pitch is with the kind of services one can get from budget airlines. They are cheap, no frills airlines that can actually get you from point A to B without the hefty price of a full service airlines. For foreign students on a shoe-string budget wanting to spend their dollars on travel to their short-term ESL courses, this value-for-money appeal is clearly enticing. In other words, they get what they pay for.

Authentic Standard English/PhE

The Philippines ESL pitch boasts of its "American English accent" while the results of the research studies presented in this paper reveal a discontent in the FTs' quasi-American English accent. Others have criticized PhE and pointed out a few of its linguistic features, i.e. pronunciation and accent, which caused communication breakdown and led to learning difficulties. These issues concerning the comprehensibility of PhE to foreign students, all from Kachru's outside circle, are similar to the findings of Dita and De Leon (2017) which suggest that PhE is 60% less intelligible to speakers of English from the expanding circle (cf. Dayag, 2007). They attribute the lack of intelligibility (recognition of individual words or utterances) to the students' inadequate exposure to PhE. Dita and De Leon (2017) believe this can be remedied by raising the students' awareness of the different varieties of English and their phonological features (p.111). They also argue that English teachers in the Philippines should resist from using the native speaker model as the "performance target in the classrooms" (p. 111), citing Smith and Rafiqzad's (1979) view that the phonology of native speakers are not more intelligible than non-native speakers. This was proven to be true in Deterding's (2005) research investigation of undergraduate Singaporean listeners and the intelligibility of a non-standard British English variety (Estuary English- large regional dialect of lower middle-class accents, cf. Trudgill, 2001). His findings suggest that segmental issues i.e. 'th fronting,' glottalization of medial /t/, and fronting of the high, back, rounded vowel, are impediments to intelligibility. The subjects were unaccustomed to hearing this 'inner circle' variety, and a few of them conveyed their annoyance, with one complaining that "he almost made my blood boil because I could hardly understand his words" (2005, p. 435).

EFL students (and others such as their parents) must be made aware that native speakers of English also have different accents, and that these language/pronunciation variations can be so extreme that even other native speakers may find them incomprehensible. Clearly, these will prove to be more challenging for non-native speakers. It is worth remembering, for instance, that speakers of Britain's Standard English, usually referred to as Received Pronunciation (RP), comprise only 3% of the population (Trudgill, 1974).

However, the British Library (n.d.) notes that “recent estimates suggest only 2% of the UK population speak it.” (para. 3). The British library also adds that:

Like any other accent, RP has also changed over the course of time. The voices we associate with early BBC broadcasts, for instance, now sound extremely old-fashioned to most. Just as RP is constantly evolving, so our attitudes towards the accent are changing. (para. 6)

Even the BBC now comprises an international team of professional broadcasters with diverse backgrounds. One of their daily presenters for Asia Business Report is a multi-award-winning broadcast journalist, Rico Hizon, born, raised and educated in the Philippines. He joined BBC World News in 2002 in Singapore (BBC, 2018). He is still the only Filipino face in international network news, and admitted in an interview that he occasionally receives racist comments from people “who expect the British Broadcasting Corporation to be more, well, British, even as the media giant aspires to extend its reach beyond the borders of the old empire” (Caruncho, 2017.) Hizon, however, remains steadfast and professional about his work and in the same interview says:

Whenever I sit in my anchor’s chair, I’m proud to be a Filipino and raise the Philippine flag... I just wanted to maintain my own identity. I didn’t want to change. Other people have branded my accent—which is neither British nor American—as the pan-Asian English accent. It’s right there in the middle: it’s clear, it’s understandable and I get my message across. (Caruncho, 2017, para. 10)

Stories like the one above should be shared with EFL students (and others stake holders in the ESL industry) to broaden their minds about the changing nature of cultural and linguistic differences, as well as redefining what it means to be a skilled professional in today’s inter-connected world. This could be a good opportunity for the students to reflect on their own future career prospects where learning English (and learning it well) is just one of the many steps they need to take to achieve their dreams. But the most important lesson students can glean from Hizon’s story is how to deal with discrimination and differences. Hizon has learned from these experiences, and believes that:

... it all boils down to flexibility and communication...You will always have critics, but you just have to continue doing what you do ... Just be passionate about your work and do it to the best of your ability every show.

The English language has changed over the years and so has the BBC. Society has also changed, and it will continue to. However, has the attitude of EFL learners changed towards their perceived standard of English? It is quite evident that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done to dethrone the

hegemony of “standard English” and the perceived superiority of native-speaker accents. Students in the research mentioned in this paper expressed a preference for an L1, i.e. British/American English. This is another example where students are ill-informed and easily persuaded by stereotypes reinforced by the mainstream media. EFL/ESL teachers need to ask which variety of American English, for instance, they prefer to learn, imitate, and teach. Americans living in the Bronx or Long Island New York sound different from those living in Texas. Which of the 50 States should they choose from? This also applies to British English varieties, and to all the “inner circle” English varieties. As Martin (2010), Borlongan (2016) and many others have pointed out, there are sub-circles within the inner circles. All EFL/ESL students need to be exposed to different forms of English, and PhE is just one of the many varieties out there. In addition, the EFL teacher should also stress that the language changes from one geographical place to another.

The Philippines as an ESL/EFL environment

The Philippines claims to provide an English-speaking environment where the majority of the population speaks English. However, one of the comments made by the EFL/ESL students in the research cited above is that many/most Filipinos speak Fil/Tag-lish and that the language spoken in the streets is Filipino. EFL/ESL students’ complaints about feeling disgruntled with their learning experiences deserve to be heard and understood. They are promised an ESL environment, and rightly so. On arrival, however, they realize that this is not entirely true! This could all be different if they were told from the outset that they would be immersing themselves in a Philippine ESL environment.

Let us consider, how different the Philippine ESL environment (in the Greater Manila Area or Cebu City) is from that of, let us say, the city of London, UK? ESL learners who studied in the Philippines lamented the lack of ESL presence in the city where they studied English. They complained about people constantly speaking Filipino. If they were told prior to going to the Philippines about the basic population statistics in Manila i.e. number of local Filipinos, ethnic, education, demographic profile, then they should assume that Filipinos speak Filipino as well as their own variety of English. Speaking their own vernacular should not be a surprise for them then. How different would it be if they went to London, UK? It would not be surprising to hear people in the streets of London speaking languages other than English, and to hear people speaking English with various accents, and not (necessarily) British English. For ESL students, this variety should, in the long run, be beneficial and even desirable because they will in their future careers be communicating with people from different backgrounds. This is the reality, and that is how they are going to deal with living in the real world.

FTs' identity(ies) as (near) native speaker/ non-native speaker of English

Choe's (2016) qualitative research on the identity formation of Filipino ESL teachers teaching Korean students in the Philippines examined their perceived image and status as non-native teachers. These teachers, who had not received any TESOL teaching certificate or Bachelor's/ MA degrees in TESOL and related fields, were all affiliated with two different language academies in Manila. All 12 described themselves as non-native teachers because of their Filipino English accent. They openly discussed the discrimination they had experienced because of their accented English; some had previously not been accepted for teaching posts because they did not sound American enough, while others were strongly recommended to hone their American English. A few had undertaken a pronunciation and "accent-reduction" training sponsored by the hiring institution. In comparison to native speakers of English, they perceived themselves as "deficient" or even inferior. Some felt that they would never be as good as native speakers in spite of the number of years in service as English teachers. The lack of knowledge of the target culture (American culture) and historical facts about US history also made them feel less competent. Nonetheless, they considered themselves to be qualified ELT professionals despite the lack of ESL teaching training qualifications and regardless of their perceived inferiority issues brought about by their non-nativeness. It is through this lack of ESL teaching qualifications on the part of FTs that TESOL and/or ESL teacher training organizations found a marketing niche (Lorente and Tupas, 2002). They capitalize on the FTs' insecurities as non-native speakers with strong PhE accent vis a vis the desired-American-native-speaker accent. The native-speakerism ideology is still prevalent throughout the world and sends out a clear message that American English is something to be desired, and that having a PhE accent is simply unsatisfactory and will not help them get the highly coveted ESL teaching jobs.

Choe's (2016) study has touched on valid issues relating to the lack of regulations on teaching standards. Teachers' qualifications are not regulated by the government; thus Filipino ESL teachers are vulnerable to becoming victims of fraudulent organizations. Hicap (2009) points out that there are numerous online job and classified ads aimed at recruiting ESL teachers that do not require qualifications. The key to getting these jobs, he adds, is having an American accent. He posits that, "Some online English teachers have noted that ESL centers in the Philippines offer below-standard wages despite the fact that they charge hefty fees for Korean students" (Hicap, para. 33). Unfortunately, at the time of writing this paper, there has been little research done on this issue, particularly on the plight of Filipino ESL teachers in private language academies.

Conclusion and Recommendations for the stakeholders

The following are recommendations for all the stakeholders: Filipino teachers, ESL/EFL students, ESL providers, and the Philippine government.

ESL/EFL students wishing to go to the Philippines to study/learn English should be first made aware of the intricacies of the English language varieties along with their pronunciations and accents. Teachers should expose them to recordings of various inner circle varieties, and make them see and understand that other varieties of English spoken by native speakers can also be difficult; indeed, sometimes more onerous than trying to comprehend “non-native speakers” from the Philippines. EFL students need to be aware of their own misinformed ideologies concerning their views on native speakerism and their prejudices toward other less popular varieties of English. They are likely to be less informed about the facts and realities of the status of their favored inner-circle English varieties. Much of this prejudice stems from prejudging other people and this may be due to the lack of information, support, and direction that would help them to understand prejudice and learning about how stereotypes affect us. Education has a significant role in preventing linguistic prejudice and prejudice in general. It is clear that prejudices are present among young people. The students who go to the Philippines are generally young high schoolers and undergraduate students; It would be helpful to educate them and produce trusted information, and hopefully eradicate, if not minimize, their linguistic prejudice and attitudes toward other varieties of English. It is now more important than ever to embrace variety. As Crystal (2000) aptly puts it:

We are already living in a world where most of the varieties we encounter are something other than traditional British or American English. We do our students a disservice if they leave our care unprepared for the brave new linguistic world which awaits them. (p. 6)

The aim of teaching ESL to foreign students in the Philippines is to enable them to use English to communicate with people in a world where English has become the most widely used international language. So it is critical that their pronunciation is intelligible enough for them to be understood by a wide variety of interlocutors. Learning English in the Philippines already puts them in an ideally authentic language learning environment as they will have to use English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2000) to communicate with Filipinos and other foreign students who are more like themselves than native speakers. It is worth reiterating the fact that “...about 80 per cent of verbal exchanges in which English is used as a second or foreign language do not involve native speakers of English” (Beneke, 1991, as cited in Gnutzmann, 2000, p. 357). ESL/EFL students must realize that one of the best ways to learn a language is through socialization and to socialize through language (Och, 1993). Many of these students learn a foreign language in their school, travel to the Philippines for a short English intensive course program, and yet they do not retain the skill they

have learned for very long due to a lack of practice outside the classroom and through not enough socialization with the locals during their stay in the Philippines. It is a lost opportunity, as one of the greatest joys of learning a language is being able to speak it with the locals. The course providers should also make arrangements for social gatherings with the locals or student clubs, go to places where people do speak English, thus giving them the opportunity to mingle with other speakers of English.

While teaching conversation and grammar are essential, it is equally important to teach learners to make themselves understood and to understand what is said to them in a variety of contexts. Jenkins (2000) suggests that teachers must be aware of the learners' pronunciation problems that affect their intelligibility and prioritize pronunciation teaching rather than "shoot in all directions" aimlessly (p. 104) to try and achieve after a perfect, native-like pronunciation. According to Walker (2002) "whilst it is perfectly legitimate for a student to aspire to a native speaker accent, it is surely wrong for a teacher, explicitly or otherwise, to push students to feel that anything other than this is an imperfection" (p. 9). The teaching of pronunciation is often a challenge for Filipino teachers, but as English language teachers, it is one of skills that they need to practice and be good at.

Another issue noted in the research studies cited above was that of foreign students' complaints about FTs' constant code-switching or the use of Fil-Taglish in class. FTs have a professional duty not to code-switch with their students. Koreans, Chinese, Taiwanese, etc. choose to learn English in the Philippines; they want to learn how to speak English properly, and they want to learn it in an ESL context. Students do not have external control outside the classroom but in the classroom, it is the teachers' responsibility to provide the kind of language these students have paid for.

The issue of teacher training, qualifications, and professional development need to be underscored. FTs ought to get recognized qualifications such as Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA), Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (DELTA), TESOL Core-Certificate Program, and other teaching qualifications and courses endorsed by the British Council, IATEFL, and TESOL International Association. The country needs to recognize the training and qualification needs of Filipino ESL teachers and managers, particularly those directly involved in delivering language courses to foreign students, and to ensure strict quality guidelines in improving the teaching and learning of English. The government needs to partner with established academic schools, top universities in the country, and acclaimed and renowned local scholars who can establish regular training programs and workshops for continuous professional development in major cities and areas.

The Philippines needs to establish a governing body solely for the ESL industry to ensure the quality of ESL institutions and teacher training centers that will raise teacher quality, which in turn will raise student outcomes and success in ESL learning. The accreditation process must be transparent, less-

bureaucratic, and efficient. This body shall guarantee an effective way to standardize and improve ESL education being provided by individual schools and ensure that they are effectively managed and deliver world class ESL curriculum standards, provide continuous teacher professional development for ESL teachers and staff, and ensure that the language schools/centers in the Philippines meet the demands and quality standards of the ESL industry.

It has been established in this paper that the ESL in the Philippines is a booming industry, and the future prospects are indeed promising. Even the Department of Tourism (DOT) and other government agencies and foreign representatives have shown support in promoting the country as an ESL destination emphasizing the 'low cost and fun' factors. The DOT (2015) has also "showcased the programs and facilities of Philippine ESL schools" in international education exhibitions and ESL fairs. While these international promotional efforts are significant, the government has to pull all these resources together and place them under one ESL umbrella agency, and organize an ESL education trade exhibition where all ESL stakeholders in the Philippines can participate. The aim is to bring together all registered ESL schools in the Philippines for them to showcase their wares, i.e. facilities and programs, ESL teachers and managers can share ideas, practices, and technologies via workshops and symposiums. In this way, there is transparency as to who's who in the industry. There is a dire need for the government to release an ESL directory for information on school services, training and accreditation accessible to anyone and anytime. In this way, teachers, learners, and suppliers are assured of standardized quality of services and accountability of the stakeholders.

Implications for future research

This paper discusses the issues concerning the Philippines as the study destination for English learners. Accordingly, the practical contribution of the present research is that it provides much needed background data on some of the perceived flaws and shortcomings identified by various research studies. It was also argued that in spite of these weaknesses, the Philippines is an ideal destination for ESL learners not only because it is economical and culturally appropriate, it is actually better from a pedagogic point of view. However, the shortcomings mentioned in this paper must first be addressed. This study, being of an exploratory and interpretive nature, raises a number of opportunities for future research, both in terms of theory development and concept validation. Empirical research will in fact be necessary to validate the concepts and constructs that emerged from the inductive analysis given in this study.

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Appendix – Full results of student survey conducted at Macau Polytechnic Institute in December 2017. Students surveyed from Design and Visual Arts Departments.

Note, in the statistical section Putonghua is referred to as Mandarin, for ease of presentation

Figures for Macau students (n=45)

Which language do you speak in your family home? (Mandarin, Cantonese, etc?) C=43 M=2

What language is your major taught in? (English, Mandarin, Cantonese?) M=8 CME=5 C=32

Please answer the following statements

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Disagree 4= Strongly Disagree

The information you give will be anonymous and is to be used for research purposes.

	1	2	3	4
1. Being able to speak English well is important for my future	29	16		
2. Being able to speak Mandarin well is important for my future	19	24	2	
3. Being able to speak Cantonese well is important for my future.	20	20	4	2
4. Being able to speak Portuguese well is important for my future	5	24	14	3
5. English should be the language of instruction in my major	10	26	9	
6. Mandarin should be the language of instruction in my major	6	21	16	2
7. Cantonese should be the language of instruction in my major	15	18	9	3
8. Portuguese should be the language of instruction in my major		13	22	10
9. I can communicate well in English	3	14	25	3
10. I can communicate well in Mandarin	15	26	3	1
11. I can communicate well in Cantonese	34	10		1
12. I can communicate well in Portuguese	2	2	7	34
13. I sometimes mix different languages when I am speaking	10	26	9	
14. I sometimes mix different languages in my social media posts	7	29	9	
15. I am able to practice my English outside MPI	3	26	13	3
16. English should be an official language of	9	22	13	1

Macau				
17. Cantonese should be an official language of Macau	32	12	1	
18. Mandarin should be an official language of Macau	11	18	11	5
19. Portuguese should be an official language of Macau	7	22	10	6

Figures for Mainland China Students (n=17)

Which language do you speak in your family home? (Mandarin, Cantonese, etc?) C=6 M=11

What language is your major taught in? (English, Mandarin, Cantonese?) M=6 C=3 E=3 P=1 MP=1

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Disagree 4= Strongly Disagree

	1	2	3	4
1. Being able to speak English well is important for my future	13	4		
2. Being able to speak Mandarin well is important for my future	13	3		
3. Being able to speak Cantonese well is important for my future.	4	9	3	1
4. Being able to speak Portuguese well is important for my future	5	3	6	3
5. English should be the language of instruction in my major	7	9	1	
6. Mandarin should be the language of instruction in my major	6	10	1	
7. Cantonese should be the language of instruction in my major	6	7	3	1
8. Portuguese should be the language of instruction in my major	3	5	8	1
9. I can communicate well in English	4	6	7	
10. I can communicate well in Mandarin	13	3	1	
11. I can communicate well in Cantonese	10	3	1	3
12. I can communicate well in Portuguese	2	3	4	8
13. I sometimes mix different languages when I am speaking	4	8	4	
14. I sometimes mix different languages in my social media posts	3	9	3	2
15. I am able to practice my English outside MPI	4	9	4	
16. English should be an official language of Macau	4	7	6	
17. Cantonese should be an official language of Macau	7	8	2	
18. Mandarin should be an official language of Macau	9	6	2	
19. Portuguese should be an official language of Macau	4	8	5	

Figures for all students surveyed (n=62)

Which language do you speak in your family home: C=49. M=13

Which language is your major taught in? C=35, M=14 E=3 CME=5 P=1

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Disagree 4= Strongly Disagree

	1	2	3	4
1. Being able to speak English well is important for my future	42	20		
2. Being able to speak Mandarin well is important for my future	32	27	4	2
3. Being able to speak Cantonese well is important for my future.	24	29	7	3
4. Being able to speak Portuguese well is important for my future	10	27	20	6
5. English should be the language of instruction in my major	17	35	10	
6. Mandarin should be the language of instruction in my major	12	31	17	2
7. Cantonese should be the language of instruction in my major	21	25	12	4
8. Portuguese should be the language of instruction in my major	3	18	30	11
9. I can communicate well in English	7	20	32	3
10. I can communicate well in Mandarin	28	29	4	1
11. I can communicate well in Cantonese	44	13	1	4
12. I can communicate well in Portuguese	4	5	11	42
13. I sometimes mix different languages when I am speaking	14	35	13	
14. I sometimes mix different languages in my social media posts	10	38	12	2
15. I am able to practice my English outside MPI	7	35	17	
16. English should be an official language of Macau	13	29	19	
17. Cantonese should be an official language of Macau	39	20	3	
18. Mandarin should be an official language of Macau	20	30	13	
19. Portuguese should be an official language of Macau	11	30	15	6

Comparison of modal values for Macau and Mainland Chinese students
*Macau and Mainland China (Macau students in the left-hand column,
 Mainland China students in the right-hand column)*

1. Being able to speak English well is important for my future	SA	SA
2. Being able to speak Mandarin well is important for my future	A	SA
3. Being able to speak Cantonese well is important for my future.	SA/A	A
4. Being able to speak Portuguese well is important for my future	A	D
5. English should be the language of instruction in my major	A	A
6. Mandarin should be the language of instruction in my major	A	A
7. Cantonese should be the language of instruction in my major	A	A
8. Portuguese should be the language of instruction in my major	D	D
9. I can communicate well in English	D	D
10. I can communicate well in Mandarin	A	SA
11. I can communicate well in Cantonese	SA	SA
12. I can communicate well in Portuguese	SD	SD
13. I sometimes mix different languages when I am speaking	A	A
14. I sometimes mix different languages in my social media posts	A	A
15. I am able to practice my English outside MPI	A	A
16. English should be an official language of Macau	A	A
17. Cantonese should be an official language of Macau	SA	A
18. Mandarin should be an official language of Macau	A	SA
19. Portuguese should be an official language of Macau	A	A

Modal values for all students surveyed

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Disagree 4= Strongly Disagree

1. Being able to speak English well is important for my future	SA
2. Being able to speak Mandarin well is important for my future	SA
3. Being able to speak Cantonese well is important for my future.	A
4. Being able to speak Portuguese well is important for my future	A
5. English should be the language of instruction in my major	A
6. Mandarin should be the language of instruction in my major	A
7. Cantonese should be the language of instruction in my major	A
8. Portuguese should be the language of instruction in my major	D
9. I can communicate well in English	D
10. I can communicate well in Mandarin	A
11. I can communicate well in Cantonese	SA
12. I can communicate well in Portuguese	SD
13. I sometimes mix different languages when I am speaking	A
14. I sometimes mix different languages in my social media posts	A
15. I am able to practice my English outside MPI	A
16. English should be an official language of Macau	A
17. Cantonese should be an official language of Macau	SA
18. Mandarin should be an official language of Macau	A
19. Portuguese should be an official language of Macau	A