

The Conditional Integrative Model of Teacher Migration: A Qualitative Evidence Synthesis of J-1 Educators in U.S. Schools

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ABSTRACT: The global shortage of educators has intensified reliance on J-1 exchange teachers in U.S. schools; however, the processes through which these teachers adapt professionally and instructionally remain under-theorized. *Purpose:* This qualitative systematic review synthesizes existing empirical research to examine how J-1 exchange teachers navigate classroom practice, professional identity, and institutional conditions during their transition into U.S. schools. *Methods:* Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a systematic search of ERIC, Scopus, and PsycInfo identified 11 qualitative studies meeting inclusion criteria. Data were synthesized using higher-order thematic synthesis and cross-study comparative analysis. *Findings:* The synthesis consolidated 27 initial themes into five integrative findings that describe teachers' experiences related to transition challenges, professional identity shifts, instructional adaptation, relational and emotional coping, and structural conditions shaping adjustment. Across studies, adaptation emerged as a non-linear process influenced by both individual effort and institutional context. *Conclusion:* Drawing on these patterns, the study proposes a Conditional Integrative Model of Teacher Migration, which conceptualizes teacher adaptation as contingent upon the interaction of pedagogical adjustment, relational support, and structural conditions rather than individual resilience alone. This review contributes to a synthesis-based framework that may inform induction design, institutional support structures, and future research on international teacher migration.

KEYWORDS: J-1 exchange teachers, teacher migration, qualitative evidence synthesis, teacher induction, cultural brokerage, J-1 (teacher exchange) teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing mismatch between the supply of educators and the demand for qualified teachers has emerged as a defining challenge in 21st-century education. UNESCO (2024) documented a sustained global shortage of skilled educators, warning that staffing deficits increasingly threaten the stability of education systems worldwide. In the United States, this crisis has intensified as an aging workforce and post-pandemic burnout have accelerated teacher attrition (Garcia & Weiss, 2022). In response, many school districts have turned to international recruitment, particularly through the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program, as a practical strategy for filling persistent vacancies. Although originally designed to promote cultural exchange, the program has become a major recruitment pathway in high-need areas such as STEM, special education, and high-poverty schools (Department of State, n.d.). As Oca and Malaga (2025) argued, this reliance reflects broader economic and institutional push-pull forces that require teachers to navigate multiple social, cultural, and pedagogical systems at once. Recent studies have shown that the biggest problem for J-1 exchange teachers has not been their subject-matter knowledge, but rather their ability to adjust to classroom management, student behavior, communication norms, and institutional expectations. This is especially true when authority-centered traditions from their home countries clash with U.S. models that stress relational authority and student voice (Harrison-Reid, 2025; Laureta & Guanzon, 2025). Teachers often entered as technically competent instructors yet reported feeling unprepared for informal classroom interactions, discipline systems, and relational expectations that differed sharply from those in their home contexts. These challenges have been especially visible in special education and technologically dense classrooms, where instruction depends heavily on relationship-building, role flexibility, individualized behavior supports, and constant engagement with digital systems for instruction, assessment, communication, and documentation (Gomez-Lange, 2024; Cutor, 2025). The research gap addressed in this study is the absence of a unified, evidence-based synthesis that identifies shared challenges, adaptive strategies, and practitioner-relevant implications across studies of J-1 exchange teachers. To address this gap,

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the present study synthesizes qualitative evidence from 11 included studies to construct a unified model designed to support J-1 exchange teachers in adjusting to and sustaining effectiveness in U.S. schools.

Research Questions

1. How do J-1 exchange teachers experience and navigate transition challenges during entry into U.S. school contexts?
2. In what ways do J-1 exchange teachers negotiate shifts in professional identity, instructional practice, and relational positioning within U.S. classrooms?
3. How do relational, emotional, and structural conditions shape teachers' processes of adaptation, classroom functioning, and professional stability over time?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Teacher Shortages and International Recruitment

Global teacher shortages have become a central concern in education policy. UNESCO (2024) estimated that tens of millions of additional teachers will be needed worldwide to meet universal education goals, with shortages concentrated in low- and middle-income countries and in high-demand subject areas. These gaps are not only demographic but also structural, reflecting uneven investment, working conditions, and professional status across regions. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI, 2019) reported that there are still shortages in the United States because fewer people are enrolling in teacher preparation programs, more teachers are leaving their jobs, teachers are paid less than people in other fields, and teachers are being asked to do more work. One policy response to these shortages has been international recruitment. Within this context, the U.S. Department of State's BridgeUSA Exchange Visitor Program, including its teacher track, positions international recruitment as both a workforce strategy and a form of cultural exchange. J-1 exchange teachers are hired to fill staffing gaps and promote cross-cultural understanding at the same time. This initiative connects labor market solutions with diplomatic and soft-power goals.

J-1 Exchange and Internationally Recruited Teachers in U.S. Schools

J-1 exchange teachers have become a significant component of how U.S. school districts address persistent staffing shortages, particularly in high-need and hard-to-staff areas. Accredited public and private schools in the U.S. can hire qualified teachers from other countries to work in U.S. classrooms for a short time as part of an educational and cultural exchange program (Blad, 2025). This pathway has transformed international teacher recruitment from a marginal practice into a central workforce strategy in many districts. Teacher migration operates as a structural response to unequal global teacher labor markets and working conditions. International recruitment reflects broader global patterns in which educators from lower-resourced or lower-income systems move to higher-income systems experiencing shortages. J-1 cohorts in the United States commonly include teachers from countries such as the Philippines, Colombia, and Spain, who are drawn by higher salaries, professional opportunities, and cross-cultural experience. At the same time, transnational recruitment can generate new vulnerabilities, including recruitment fees, debt burdens, and unequal protections within loosely regulated hiring arrangements (Barrows, 2025).

Lived Experiences of J-1 Exchange Teachers in U.S. Classrooms

Studies of exchange teachers consistently described early transition as destabilizing. Common challenges included culture shock, classroom authority struggles, unfamiliar instructional systems, and linguistic friction around accent and classroom communication (Lanoy & Idul, 2025; Gomez-Lange, 2024). These studies also indicated that people can be strong, cope with relationships, and use their cultural and linguistic background as teaching tools, which is often called cultural brokerage (Rosales, 2024). Similar patterns emerged in studies of other J-1 exchange teachers, indicating challenges associated with authority, student behavior, accountability systems, language, parent communication, and professional identity (Harrison-Reid, 2025; Merritt, 2024). Although differences appeared by subject area, language background, and visa or recruitment pathway, the overall pattern remained consistent: early transition was marked by strain, followed by gradual adjustment through relational support, learning institutional norms, and revising classroom practice (Trinidad, 2025).

Conceptualizing Culture, Language, and Adaptation

Cultural difference has often been framed through Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions, which emphasized national patterns in authority, individualism, and communication. While widely used, this framework risks oversimplifying culture and treating it as static. Postcolonial and World Englishes perspectives provide a more critical lens, with Martin (2020) and Romero (2020) showing how colonial histories shaped language hierarchies, professional legitimacy, and expectations about "proper" English. Villaver's (2024) theory of adaptive cross-cultural pedagogy offers a practice-centered lens, conceptualizing adaptation as

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reflective and relational negotiation of cultural expectations, institutional demands, and student needs. This perspective aligns with constructs such as cultural brokerage, relational authority, and professional agency under constraint.

Qualitative Systematic Review and Synthesis in Teacher Education

Qualitative systematic review and metasynthesis move beyond summarizing individual studies toward generating higher-order understanding. Core principles emphasize interpretive explanation, transparency in search, selection, and analysis, and clear reporting standards to support rigor (Fingeld-Connett, 2013, 2014; Pope et al., 2007; O'Brien et al., 2014; Creswell, 2014). Haddaway et al. (2022) extended PRISMA-style transparency to qualitative evidence synthesis, emphasizing clear documentation of identification, screening, inclusion, and analytic decision-making.

Conceptual Framework

This review is guided by four anchor constructs: adaptive cross-cultural pedagogy, cultural brokerage, relational authority and professional agency under constraint, and vulnerability–resilience in transnational teacher labor. *Adaptive cross-cultural pedagogy* refers to the ongoing process through which J-1 exchange teachers adjust instruction by negotiating their prior training, host-country expectations, and students' cultural and learning needs through reflective and relational practice (Villaver, 2024). Adaptation is understood as active sense making in daily classroom work rather than simple assimilation. *Cultural brokerage* describes how teachers use their linguistic, cultural, and migratory experiences to mediate between students, families, schools, and institutional norms. This includes translating expectations, using cultural references in instruction, and drawing on transnational experience as a teaching resource (Rosales, 2024; Trinidad, 2025). *Relational authority and professional agency under constraint* capture how teachers establish legitimacy through relationships—consistency, care, and trust—while exercising professional judgment within limiting structures such as accountability systems, visa rules, institutional hierarchies, and partner-organization arrangements (Ralph, 2024; Merritt, 2024). *Vulnerability–resilience* in transnational teacher labor frames international teaching as shaped by both risk and growth. Vulnerability emerges from migration, language stigma, cultural misrecognition, visa dependency, and institutional marginalization, while resilience develops through relational support, persistence, reframing hardship, and long-term professional and personal growth (Harrison-Reid, 2025; Lanoy & Idul, 2025; Rosales, 2024).

3. METHOD

3.1 Design

This study employed a qualitative systematic review (QSR) design (Cohen et al., 2007) to synthesize research on J-1 exchange teachers' lived experiences in U.S. classrooms. This design facilitates an interpretive integration of multiple qualitative studies, moving beyond simple description to illuminate patterned experiences across varied geographic and institutional contexts. To ensure the highest level of analytic transparency, the review process adheres to the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement. Methodological rigor was further maintained by appraising study quality via the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist, ensuring the synthesis is built upon a foundation of sound evidence. Rather than a simple aggregation of findings, this study utilizes Higher-Order Thematic Synthesis. This involved a rigorous three-stage process: first, the extraction of 'second-order' constructs (the interpretations of the primary researchers); second, the development of descriptive themes; and third, the generation of 'third-order' analytical themes that offer a novel, overarching conceptual explanation of the J-1 teacher experience.

3.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

Four Boolean search strings were developed and applied across ERIC and Google Scholar to identify studies on international teachers in the United States. These strings combined population terms (e.g., J-1 teachers, migrant teachers), process terms (e.g., adaptation, acculturation, identity), contextual terms (e.g., U.S. schools), and methodological terms (e.g., qualitative study, lived experience).

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Table 1. Keywords and Combinations Used in the Search Strategy

Search Block	Conceptual Focus	Search Terms (combined with AND across blocks)
Search #1	Target population + adaptation	("J-1 teachers" OR "international teachers" OR "foreign teachers" OR "migrant teachers" OR "transnational teachers") AND (adaptation OR integration OR acculturation OR transition OR identity OR experience OR challenges) AND ("United States" OR "U.S. schools" OR "host country")
Search #2	Teacher migration + mobility	("teacher migration" OR "teacher mobility" OR "international teacher programs") AND (experience OR adaptation OR adjustment OR identity) AND ("United States")
Search #3	Foreign-trained teacher transition	("international educators" OR "foreign-trained teachers") AND (cultural adaptation OR professional transition OR acculturation) AND ("U.S. schools" OR "American education system")
Search #4	Qualitative focus	("J-1 teachers" OR "international teachers") AND ("qualitative study" OR "lived experience" OR phenomenology OR "case study") AND ("United States")

3.3 Screening Process

The combined search yielded 2393 records (ERIC = 48; Google Scholar = 2345). After removing one duplicate, 2248 records remained. Title and abstract screening removed records that did not match the study purpose. After this screening, 23 records remained and advanced to full-text eligibility review.

3.4 Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility was determined through full-text review using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Tables 2 and 3). Studies were included if they published 2012–2025; J-1 or comparable international teachers in U.S. schools; K–12 U.S. classrooms or teacher-education contexts tied to instructional practice; teacher experiences with instructional challenges, classroom management, cultural adjustment, coping, or professional learning; qualitative or mixed methods with clearly reported qualitative findings; and peer-reviewed journal articles or full-text university dissertations. Studies were excluded if they focused only on students, administrators, policymakers, or program coordinator; immigration policy, visa administration, or exchange programs did not include classroom-level data; non-instructional exchange contexts or settings were deemed irrelevant to K–12 teaching practice; quantitative studies without qualitative findings were considered relevant; conducted entirely outside U.S. classrooms; insufficient methodological detail or inadequate qualitative reporting; and grey literature without formal academic review.

Table 2. Inclusion Criteria for Study Selection

Subject	Criteria	Justification
Publication period	Studies published 2021–2025	Capture recent research reflecting contemporary U.S. classroom practices and support structures for international teachers.
Participants	J-1 or comparable international teachers in U.S. schools	Focus on practicing international teachers' lived experiences and professional challenges.
Educational context	K–12 classrooms or teacher-education contexts tied to instructional practice	Center instructional and classroom-level experiences; exclude higher-education-only and non-instructional exchange settings.

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Study focus	Teacher experiences with instructional challenges, classroom management, cultural adjustment, coping, or professional learning	Align with the aim of synthesizing how international teachers adapt to U.S. expectations and environments.
Study design	Qualitative or mixed methods with clearly reported qualitative findings	Provide depth to experiences and adaptation processes.
Location	United States	Ensure contextual consistency within U.S. educational systems.
Language	English	Feasibility and consistent interpretation.
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles or full-text university master thesis or dissertations	Dissertations and articles undergo formal review and offer rich qualitative findings.

Table 3. Exclusion Criteria for Study Selection

Subject	Exclusion Criteria	Justification
Population focus	Studies focused only on students, administrators, policymakers, or program coordinators.	The review centered on international teachers' experiences, so non-teacher populations were excluded.
Policy or program emphasis	Research on immigration policy, visa administration, or exchange programs did not include classroom-level data.	Studies without direct instructional or classroom evidence did not fit the practice-based focus.
Educational context	Studies conducted in non-instructional exchange contexts or settings were deemed irrelevant to K–12 teaching practice.	Only instructional or teacher-education contexts were considered relevant.
Study design	Only quantitative studies without qualitative findings were considered relevant.	Quantitative-only designs could not provide sufficient depth for experiences and adaptation processes.
Geographic location	Studies conducted entirely outside U.S. classrooms.	The review focused on experiences within U.S. educational systems.
Reporting quality	Studies with insufficient methodological detail or inadequate qualitative reporting.	Lack of clear methods or extractable qualitative findings would undermine reliable thematic synthesis.
Publication type	Grey literature without formal academic review.	Grey literature was excluded; university dissertations were allowed because of formal review and rigorous qualitative methods.

3.5 Study Selection

Study identification, screening, and eligibility followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines and are summarized in Figure 1. Of the 2393 records initially identified, 145 duplicates were removed. After title and abstract screening, a subset of records advanced to full-text review, and eligibility assessment reduced the sample to a small set of highly aligned qualitative studies examining international and J-1 exchange teachers' instructional experiences in U.S. K-12 classrooms, forming the final dataset for thematic synthesis ($n = 11$). Most exclusions occurred because studies focused on non-teacher populations, policy or visa administration without classroom-level data, non-U.S. contexts, quantitative-only designs, or non-instructional exchange settings.

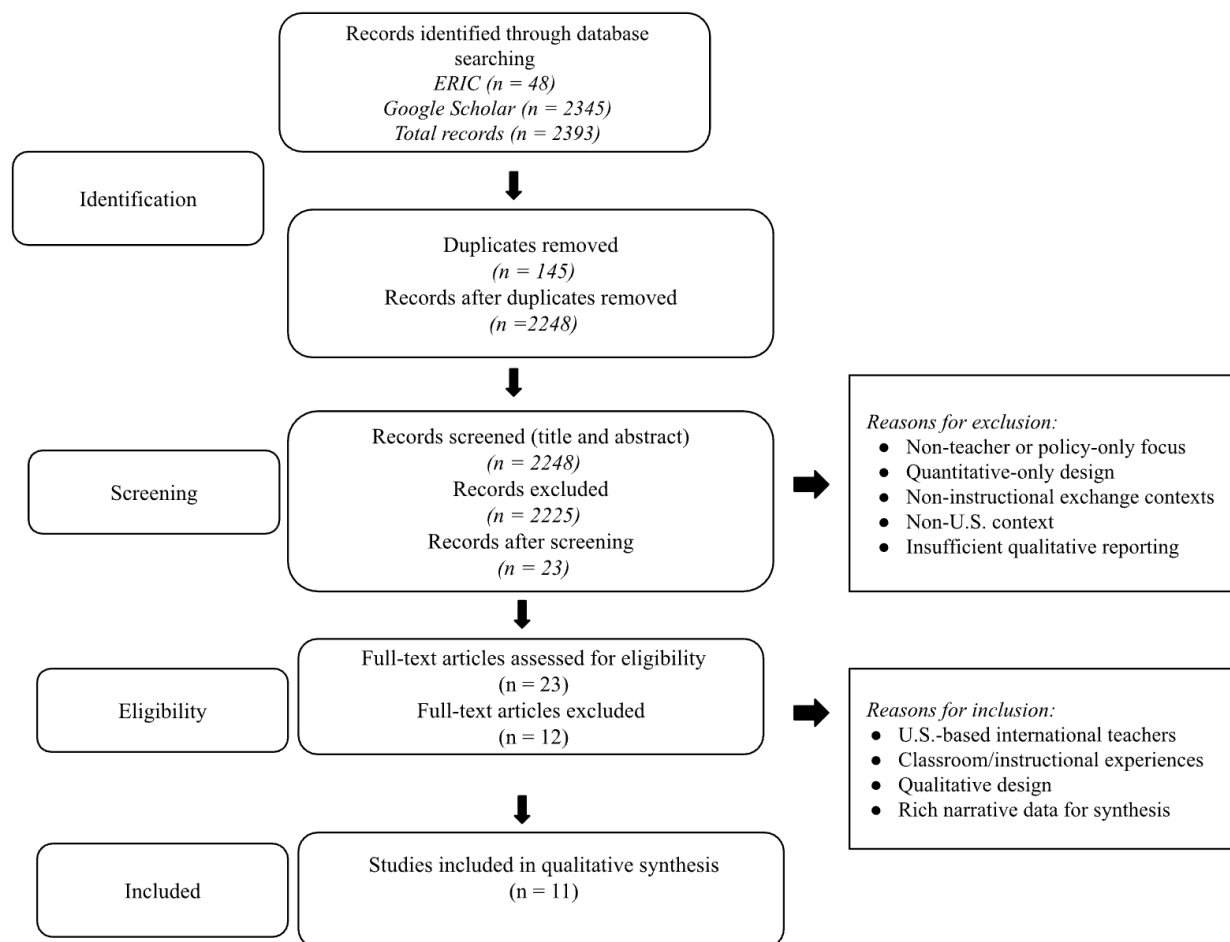


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of study identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

3.6 Data Extraction

Qualitative findings were extracted from the results, findings, and discussion sections of each included study when these sections reported J-1 exchange teachers' experiences, perceptions, challenges, or adaptive practices related to classroom instruction, management, cultural adjustment, or professional learning. Both author interpretations and participant-reported experiences were retained when they contributed to understanding instructional practice, professional identity development, relational experiences, or adjustment processes. Extracted data were organized as meaning units—coherent segments of text representing distinct experiential patterns—to support systematic comparison across studies. These meaning units were iteratively compared and grouped to identify recurring patterns across contexts. Through higher-order integration, the extracted findings were synthesized into broader experiential dimensions reflecting transition challenges, professional identity shifts, instructional adaptation, relational and emotional coping, and structural conditions shaping teachers' experiences. This inductive organization supported cross-study comparison while remaining grounded in the original reported data.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed iterative thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Meaning units were compared across studies and grouped into higher-order themes representing shared trends. Themes were arranged conceptually rather than by frequency, with conditions presented first and responses and consequences following to support analytic coherence. The analysis persisted until thematic saturation was achieved (Guest et al., 2006). In the final stage, descriptive themes were integrated into higher-order constructs and a cross-category model (Finfgeld-Connett, 2013, 2014; Thomas & Harden, 2008), consistent with qualitative reporting standards such as SRQR and JARS-Qual.

3.8 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Trustworthiness was supported through transparent documentation of search decisions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and analytic steps. *Reflexivity* was addressed through ongoing attention to how prior professional experience with internationally

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trained teachers could shape interpretation, with analytic decisions documented throughout the process. *Rigor* was strengthened through sustained cross-study comparison and iterative refinement of themes.

4. RESULTS

The qualitative synthesis generated 27 themes across four analytic categories. Through iterative comparison and higher-order integration, these were synthesized into five overarching findings that represent the shared experiences of J-1 and internationally recruited teachers in U.S. classrooms. These integrative themes consolidate the original categories and themes while remaining grounded in the extracted results. Together, they describe patterns related to transition challenges, professional identity shifts, instructional adaptation, relational and emotional coping, and structural conditions shaping teachers' experiences.

Transition Challenges in the U.S. Entry

Across studies, teachers described the early transition into U.S. schools as marked by cultural, professional, and instructional adjustment. Cultural and social disorientation appeared in both daily life and school settings, including unfamiliar routines, separation from family, housing and transportation difficulties, and differences in student behavior and testing procedures (Harrison-Reid, 2025; Ralph, 2024). Early adjustment periods were frequently associated with stress and uncertainty (Rathinam, 2024; Tatel, 2021). Teachers also reported difficulty interpreting U.S. racial classifications that did not align with nationality-based identities (Trinidad, 2025). Classroom authority expectations differed significantly from those in teachers' home countries. Participants described adjusting to less formal student-teacher interactions and the need to earn respect through consistency and relationship-building rather than positional authority (Lanoy & Idul, 2025; Rathinam, 2024). Language barriers and accountability pressures influenced teachers' confidence during this period (Harrison-Reid, 2025; Tatel, 2021). Some reported feeling discouraged by the perceived reduction in authority compared to their prior teaching roles (Tracy, 2022). Instructional system shifts were also reported, including movement from rote learning to interactive, standards-based instruction, along with adjustments to pacing, terminology, and testing practices (Ralph, 2024; Merritt, 2024; Calbi & Diano, 2025). Teachers described challenges related to unfamiliar vocabulary and high-stakes assessment systems, particularly when initial orientation was limited (Lanoy & Idul, 2025; Tatel, 2021). Language and communication demands added further strain, including the need to adjust pronunciation, interpret slang and idioms, and respond to expectations to translate for others (Ralph, 2024; Trinidad, 2025; Tracy, 2022). Institutional entry also presented challenges, including rapid onboarding, limited classroom-focused induction, and immediate workload expectations (Ralph, 2024; Rosales, 2024). Teachers also reported expanded instructional and noninstructional demands, including supporting students with limited readiness and managing additional responsibilities such as translation and after-school duties (Rathinam, 2024; Ralph, 2024; Trinidad, 2025).

Professional Identity Shifts

Across studies, teachers described changes in how they perceived themselves as professionals. Participants reported moving from positions of high respect in their home countries to environments shaped by accountability pressures and performance expectations (Harrison-Reid, 2025). Some reported questioning their competence and considering returning home, particularly during the early transition period (Ralph, 2024). Professional positioning was also influenced by external perceptions related to accent, race, and nationality (Trinidad, 2025; Rosales, 2024). Teachers described being categorized or evaluated based on linguistic and cultural identity, which affected confidence and belonging. In some cases, teachers reported hiding difficulties to avoid appearing weak (Tracy, 2022). At the same time, experiences varied, with some teachers reporting increased respect and professional recognition over time (Merritt, 2024). Growth was described across multiple studies as both professional and personal. Teachers reported expanding their instructional repertoire, gaining confidence, and taking on leadership or mentoring roles. Some described the experience as moving from limited strategies to a broader and more flexible understanding of teaching (Ralph, 2024; Rosales, 2024). Identity shifts were therefore described not only in terms of challenge but also in terms of development and role expansion (Trinidad, 2025).

Instructional Adaptation.

Teachers across studies described ongoing adjustments in instructional practices as they adapted to U.S. classroom expectations. These included shifts toward differentiation, use of IEP data, ability-based grouping, and modifications to pacing and assessment practices (Gomez-Lange, 2024; Rathinam, 2024; Tatel, 2021). Teachers described learning to make lessons more accessible and responsive to diverse student needs. Mentorship and observational learning were frequently cited as important for understanding classroom routines, behavior management, and instructional expectations not covered in formal induction (Gomez-Lange, 2024; Ralph, 2024). Teachers also described learning to use educational technologies, including learning

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management systems and digital platforms, to support communication and instruction (Lanoy & Idul, 2025). Strategic language use was reported as part of classroom adaptation. Teachers adjusted speech patterns, used idioms, and sometimes incorporated home languages to build rapport and support student understanding (Trinidad, 2025; Ralph, 2024; Merritt, 2024). Relationship-based classroom management also emerged as a consistent practice, with teachers prioritizing trust and empathy over authority-centered approaches (Lanoy & Idul, 2025; Trinidad, 2025). Teachers described teaching as an evolving practice shaped by reflection and continuous adjustment. Cultural responsiveness was also reported, including the integration of home-country traditions and cultural narratives to increase student engagement and inclusivity (Rosales, 2024; Lanoy & Idul, 2025).

Relational and Emotional Coping

Adaptation was supported by relationships and coping strategies developed over time. Teachers described seeking support from colleagues, mentors, administrators, and community networks to manage both instructional and personal challenges (Ralph, 2024; Harrison-Reid, 2025; Trinidad, 2025; Tracy, 2022). Community groups, church networks, and family connections were frequently described as important sources of emotional support. Language and cultural learning developed gradually through daily interaction, observation, and relationship-building (Tatel, 2021; Rathinam, 2024; Ralph, 2024). Emotional responses during the early months included loneliness, homesickness, anxiety, and uncertainty. Several teachers described early experiences as overwhelming or nearly leading them to return home (Trinidad, 2025; Tracy, 2022; Merritt, 2024). Coping strategies included persistence, faith, social connection, and reframing challenges as opportunities for growth (Ralph, 2024; Lanoy & Idul, 2025). Mentorship and collaborative environments were described as contributing to reassurance and resilience (Calbi & Diano, 2025; Rosales, 2024). Emotional adjustment was therefore described as gradual and supported by relational networks.

Structural and Systemic Influences

Structural and systemic conditions shaped teachers' experiences across studies. Visa dependency was described as creating insecurity and limiting teachers' willingness to advocate for themselves or pursue leadership opportunities due to fear of job loss or deportation (Trinidad, 2025; Merritt, 2024). Some teachers reported accepting expanded workloads without additional compensation under these conditions. Institutional factors, including paperwork demands, policy expectations, and limited culturally responsive training, influenced adjustment experiences (Ralph, 2024; Calbi & Diano, 2025). The presence of strong mentorship structures was consistently associated with greater confidence, resilience, and retention (Rosales, 2024; Pennington & Tracy, 2022). Findings also indicated that support from districts and partner organizations varied, with some teachers reporting limited follow-up assistance after initial placement (Harrison-Reid, 2025; Lanoy & Idul, 2025). These structural conditions shaped patterns of vulnerability, support, and long-term stability across contexts.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Cross-Theme Synthesis

Across the five integrative themes, the findings indicate that teachers' experiences were not confined to single domains but unfolded through overlapping academic, social, and structural adjustments. *Transition challenges* were closely tied to early shifts in professional confidence, as difficulties with classroom authority, language, and unfamiliar institutional systems often coincided with uncertainty about competence and role expectations (Harrison-Reid, 2025; Ralph, 2024; Trinidad, 2025; Rosales, 2024). As teachers became more familiar with routines, expectations, and student behavior norms, they described gradual movement toward instructional adjustment and more stable classroom practices (Gomez-Lange, 2024; Rathinam, 2024; Tatel, 2021). *Relational and emotional coping* appeared consistently alongside instructional adaptation. Support from colleagues, mentors, and community networks was frequently described as helping teachers manage stress, interpret classroom dynamics, and build confidence over time (Ralph, 2024; Harrison-Reid, 2025; Trinidad, 2025; Calbi & Diano, 2025). Emotional responses such as isolation, anxiety, and homesickness were most pronounced during the early transition period but were often followed by reports of gradual adjustment through persistence, social support, and daily interaction within school environments (Trinidad, 2025; Merritt, 2024; Tracy, 2022). *Structural and systemic conditions* were present across all themes. Visa dependency, workload demands, and variability in induction and mentorship shaped teachers' adjustment experiences, influencing both professional positioning and access to support (Trinidad, 2025; Merritt, 2024; Pennington & Tracy, 2022). Where mentorship and collaborative support were available, teachers described stronger confidence, improved instructional adjustment, and greater stability in their roles (Rosales, 2025; Calbi & Diano, 2025). Taken together, the findings suggest that transition challenges, identity shifts, instructional changes, coping practices, and structural conditions were experienced simultaneously rather than sequentially.

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Teachers’ accounts consistently described adjustment as developing over time through daily practice, relationships, and growing familiarity with institutional expectations.

The cross-theme synthesis indicates that the experiences of J-1 exchange teachers cannot be understood as isolated events but rather as interconnected processes that unfold across time and context. Across the included studies, early transition challenges, coping responses, evolving instructional practices, identity reconstruction, and structural conditions appeared not as separate phenomena but as dynamically related dimensions of adaptation. Patterns observed across the data suggest a gradual progression in which initial disorientation gives way to adaptive coping, followed by pedagogical recalibration and increasing professional stabilization, while structural and systemic factors continue to shape each stage of this trajectory. To clarify these recurring relationships across studies, the findings were further integrated into a visual representation that organizes the shared patterns identified in the synthesis. Figure 2 presents a conditional integrative model that reflects how the major themes interact over time, illustrating the movement from transition challenges to adaptation, enacted practice, and emerging professional outcomes under the continuing influence of structural conditions.

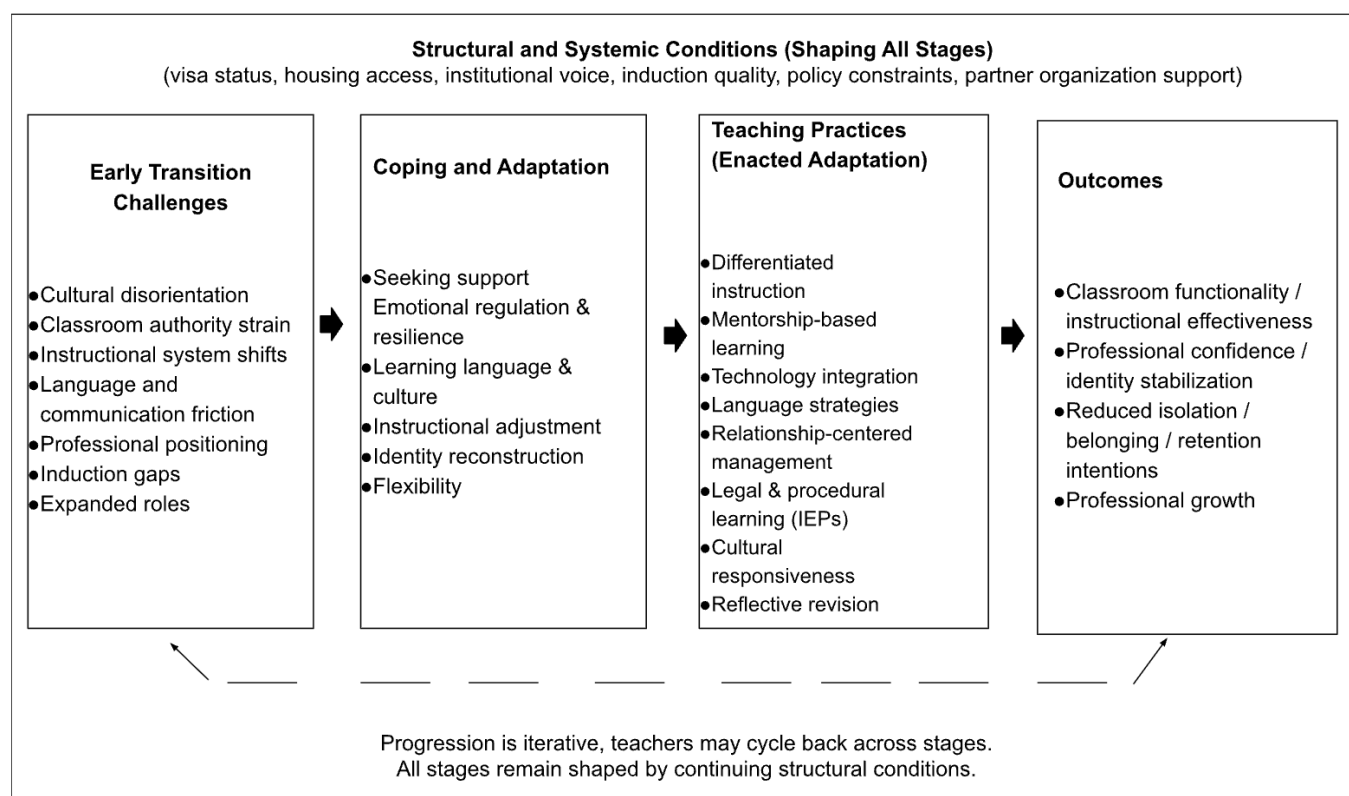


Figure 2. A Conditional Integrative Model of J-1 Exchange Teachers’ Transition, Adaptation, and Practice in U.S. Schools

5.2. Cross-Cutting Synthesizing Constructs

The synthesis identified six cross-cutting constructs that extend across the five integrative findings, representing core psychological, relational, and professional dimensions of the J-1 teaching experience. These constructs emerged from patterns repeatedly observed across studies and reflect movement from descriptive findings toward higher-level interpretation of how teachers navigate transition, identity shifts, instructional adaptation, relational coping, and structural conditions. *Belonging*. Belonging functioned as a central indicator of adjustment and stability. Across studies, teachers initially described difficulty establishing social and professional inclusion during early transition, particularly as they navigated unfamiliar institutional expectations and classroom environments. Over time, a sense of connection developed through peer relationships, mentorship, and supportive school climates. Feelings of acceptance were closely tied to confidence, classroom functioning, and longer-term adjustment (Gomez-Lange, 2024; Merritt, 2024). *Relational Authority*. In the absence of inherited professional status from their home systems, teachers described reconstructing classroom legitimacy through trust-building, consistency, and relationship-centered management. Early uncertainty around authority gradually shifted toward more stable classroom practice grounded in communication, familiarity, and relational engagement. Authority was therefore described as something that developed through interaction rather than positional power (Lanoy & Idul, 2025; Calbi & Diano, 2025). *Linguistic Capital*. Language appeared across

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studies not only as a source of difficulty but also as a resource that evolved over time. Early experiences emphasized strain related to accent, pronunciation, and communication barriers. With increased exposure and adaptation, language became a functional instructional tool used to build rapport, support clarity, and facilitate engagement. In this way, linguistic difference was gradually reframed as a professional asset within classroom practice (Ralph, 2024; Gomez-Lange, 2024). *Professional Agency under Constraint*. This construct reflects the tension between teachers' capacity to adapt and the structural limitations shaping their work. Teachers described exercising initiative in instructional adjustment, relationship-building, and system learning while simultaneously navigating restricted institutional voice, job insecurity, and pressures associated with visa dependency. Agency was therefore enacted within structural boundaries rather than independently of them (Trinidad, 2025; Pennington & Tracy, 2022). *Vulnerability–Resilience*. Across studies, vulnerability and resilience appeared as coexisting conditions rather than sequential stages. Structural stressors such as housing instability, role expansion, and uncertainty contributed to emotional and professional strain, while relational support, mentorship, and peer networks supported endurance and recovery. Resilience was consistently described as something strengthened through support and adaptation rather than an inherent personal trait (Lanoy & Idul, 2025; Rosales, 2024). *Cultural Brokerage*. Cultural mediation emerged as a recurring dimension of professional practice. Teachers described moving from early cultural disorientation toward a more active role in connecting students' experiences with classroom learning. Over time, this positioning reflected a form of cultural brokerage, where teachers navigated differences in expectations, language, and norms while supporting engagement and understanding across diverse student populations (Trinidad, 2025; Gomez-Lange, 2024). Taken together, these constructs cut across the five integrative findings, illustrating how emotional, relational, instructional, and structural dimensions intersect in shaping teachers' adaptation experiences.

5.3. Conditional Adaptation Model for Program Design

Transitioning from the analytical synthesis (Figure 2) to practical application, this study proposes a Conditional Adaptation Model intended to inform program design and policy response. Rather than introducing a new standalone theory, this section translates the patterns identified across the five integrative findings into an applied logic model for intervention (Figure 3). By converting the analytic findings into a program-oriented framework, Figure 3 highlights key intervention points where school districts and partner organizations may reduce vulnerability and strengthen teachers' capacity to adapt. Structural influences — including visa-related insecurity, uneven induction experiences, and workload demands — were consistently described as shaping early transition and long-term adjustment. Addressing these conditions through targeted institutional support may stabilize teachers' entry experiences and create space for instructional and professional development. The model also emphasizes the developmental nature of instructional adaptation and identity reconstruction. As teachers gained familiarity with classroom expectations and instructional systems, they described gradual shifts in confidence, authority, and practice. Within the model, this progression is supported through mentorship, relational networks, and structured professional learning that reinforce classroom stability and professional growth. Language development and cultural positioning are also represented as evolving dimensions within the framework. Across studies, teachers described moving from communication strain toward strategic use of language and cultural experience as part of classroom practice. In the model, this shift is linked to the strengthening of relational engagement, instructional effectiveness, and cultural brokerage. Importantly, the model reframes adaptation as a shared institutional process rather than an individual responsibility. While teachers actively adjust instruction, reconstruct identity, and build relationships, the findings indicate that the pace and stability of this adjustment are strongly shaped by system-level support. The framework therefore emphasizes coordinated support across transition, relational integration, instructional development, and structural stability. In this way, the Conditional Adaptation Model serves as a bridge between synthesis and application. It organizes the recurring patterns identified across the five integrative findings into a coherent structure that illustrates how transition challenges, identity shifts, instructional adaptation, relational coping, and structural influences interact over time, offering a practical framework for designing supports aligned with teachers' lived experiences.

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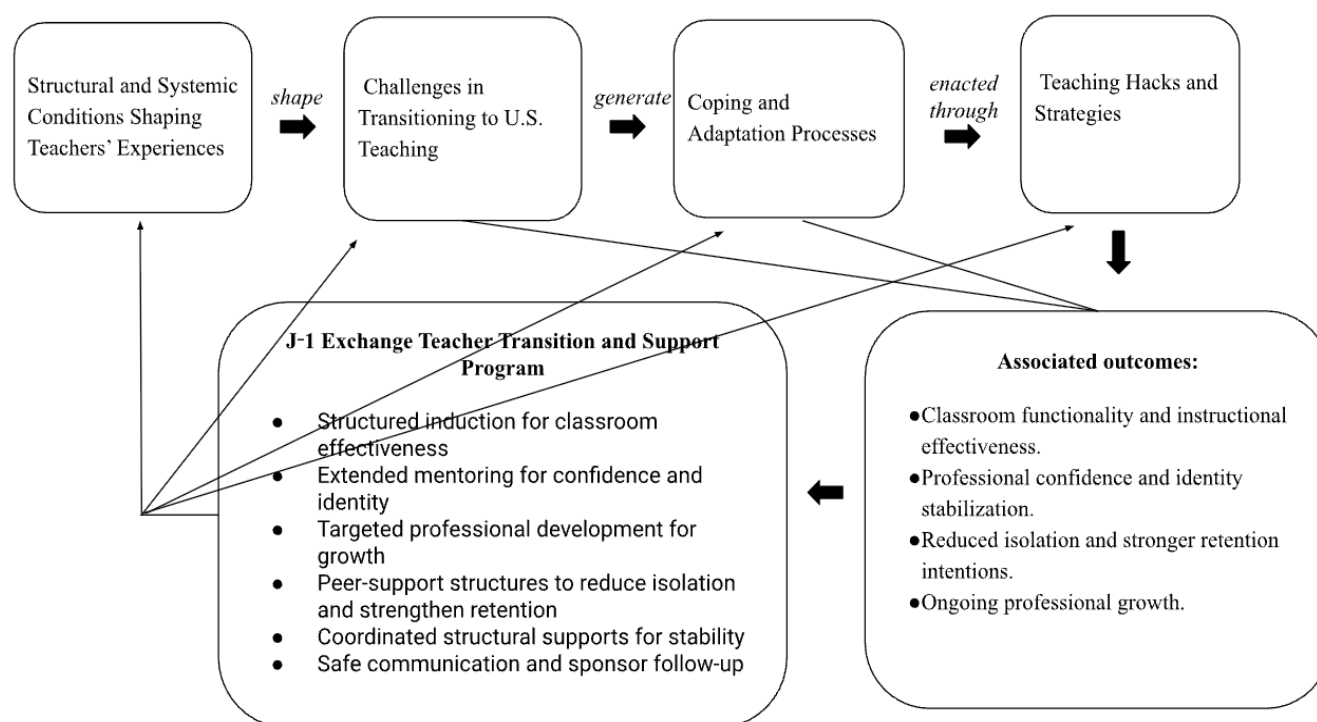


Figure 3. Conditional Adaptation Model Applied to J-1 Teacher Transition and Support Program Design

Figure 3 applies the conditional integrative model (see Figure 2) to program design. It shows how structural influences, early transition challenges, identity shifts, instructional adaptation, and relational coping processes can be used to identify concrete intervention points. These are organized into the J-1 Teacher Transition and Support Program, which includes structured induction, two-year mentoring, targeted professional development, peer-support networks, logistical assistance, and safe communication systems.

The program is designed to support effective teaching practice and lead to associated outcomes, including improved classroom functionality, strengthening of professional confidence and identity stabilization, reduced isolation and stronger retention intentions, and continued professional growth. The arrows indicate feedback loops, suggesting that program support can be adjusted as new challenges emerge, creating a continuous cycle of support rather than a one-time intervention. This model synthesizes relationships observed across studies and proposes a theoretically grounded program design rather than demonstrating program effectiveness, consistent with qualitative synthesis approaches that prioritize relational understanding over numerical ranking (Fingfeld-Connett, 2014; Thomas & Harden, 2008).

5.5. Implications for Teacher Education and Induction

Teacher education and induction frameworks designed for J-1 exchange educators must move beyond generic onboarding toward preparation that reflects the realities of U.S. classroom practice. Findings across studies highlight the importance of supporting teachers in areas such as classroom authority expectations, behavior management systems, standards-based assessment, special education procedures (including IEP-related responsibilities), and communication practices with students and families (Ralph, 2024; Harrison-Reid, 2025).

Because professional stabilization was consistently linked to relational support, programs may benefit from shifting from informal assistance toward more structured mentorship with sustained engagement over time. Studies describing stronger adjustment frequently referenced ongoing guidance, peer connection, and collaborative support during the first years of teaching (Merritt, 2024; Calbi & Diano, 2025). In addition, professional development opportunities may be most effective when focused on relationship-based classroom management, instructional differentiation, educational technology use, and culturally responsive practice (Gomez-Lange, 2024; Lanoy & Idul, 2025). The development of peer learning communities also emerged as important in reducing isolation and supporting emotional stability during the transition period (Tracy, 2022; Merritt, 2024).

5.6. Implications for Policy and Partner Organizations

The findings suggest that structural conditions play a significant role in shaping adjustment experiences. To address constraints associated with job security and institutional dependence, policymakers and sponsoring organizations may consider

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establishing protected communication channels that allow teachers to raise concerns without fear of professional risk (Trinidad, 2025; Pennington & Tracy, 2022).

Support during the early transition period may also benefit from stronger coordination between districts and partner organizations, particularly in areas such as housing, transportation, and initial logistical adjustment (Ralph, 2024; Merritt, 2024). Across studies, variability in follow-up support after placement appeared to influence patterns of stability and vulnerability.

The role of sponsoring agencies may therefore be strengthened through more sustained oversight beyond initial placement, including structured mentorship access and continued monitoring of adjustment experiences (Calbi & Diano, 2025; Lanoy & Idul, 2025). These directions align with the Conditional Adaptation Model, which positions teacher adaptation as a shared institutional responsibility shaped by structural supports as well as individual effort (Trinidad, 2025; Ralph, 2024). At the same time, these proposed intervention points require further empirical evaluation to determine their effectiveness.

5.7. Implications for Future Research

This synthesis identifies several areas for future inquiry. First, longitudinal qualitative and mixed-methods studies are needed to follow teachers from entry through professional stabilization in order to better understand how transition, identity shifts, instructional adaptation, and coping processes evolve over time. Second, comparative research across recruitment pathways and school contexts may help clarify how structural conditions influence adjustment experiences in different settings. Future studies may also apply and refine the Conditional Adaptation Model by examining how emerging data align with its key dimensions. In addition, intervention-focused and design-based research may explore the development and evaluation of induction and support programs that address the intersections of classroom authority, communication demands, instructional adjustment, and emotional well-being. Such work would help extend the model from conceptual integration toward tested programmatic application.

5.8. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the inclusion of 11 studies, while consistent with qualitative synthesis standards and sufficient for analytic depth, may not capture the full range of experiences across all U.S. contexts. Second, a number of the included studies focused on teachers from specific regions, which may reflect cultural or contextual characteristics that are not representative of all internationally recruited educators. Finally, as a qualitative evidence synthesis, this study aims to generate an integrative conceptual understanding rather than test causal relationships. The Conditional Adaptation Model presented here is therefore intended as a synthesis-based framework derived from reported experiences across studies. Its practical applications and potential effectiveness require further empirical examination through longitudinal, quantitative, or mixed-methods research.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review addresses an important gap in the literature by synthesizing the complex, multi-dimensional experiences of J-1 exchange teachers in U.S. schools. Moving beyond descriptive accounts of adjustment and “culture shock,” the study proposes a Conditional Integrative Model of Teacher Migration derived from patterns observed across the included studies. The model reflects five interrelated dimensions of experience — transition challenges, professional identity shifts, instructional adaptation, relational and emotional coping, and structural conditions — and suggests that teacher adaptation is not a static achievement but an ongoing, non-linear process shaped by their interaction. The findings indicate that while individual resilience, persistence, and adaptive instructional practices play a significant role in adjustment, the long-term integration of international educators is also shaped by institutional environments. Across studies, teachers described how relational support, mentorship, and opportunities to build trust within school communities contributed to classroom stability, professional confidence, and a developing sense of belonging. At the same time, structural conditions such as visa dependency, induction variability, and workload expectations influenced how adaptation unfolded over time. Taken together, the synthesis highlights the importance of viewing teacher adaptation as both an individual and system-level process. When school districts and partner organizations prioritize relational support, sustained mentorship, and culturally responsive professional integration, the transition of internationally recruited educators may move beyond short-term placement toward more stable professional inclusion. In this sense, the study contributes both a conceptual integration of existing qualitative evidence and a practice-oriented framework that may inform future program design, induction structures, and policy considerations. As international educators continue to play a growing role in U.S. schools, understanding the conditions that shape their adjustment, practice, and professional identity development remains an important area for continued research and institutional attention.

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Appendix A. Cross-Study Matrix of Early Transition Challenges, Coping and Adaptation, Teaching Practices, and Suggested Solutions for J-1 Exchange Teachers in U.S. Schools

Study (Author, Year)	Early Transition Challenges in U.S. Teaching	Coping and Adaptation	Teaching Practices/Strategies	Suggested Solutions
Tatel, 2021	Cultural differences, language barriers, inadequate placement support, and insufficient orientation and support systems pose significant challenges.	New approaches, training, and global networks have helped teachers evolve, making them more adaptable, resilient, and confident.	The study did not explicitly detail this process.	Improved orientation, language instruction, and support networks enhance the transfer and program experience.
Rathinam, 2024	Different cultures affect how individuals act, how classrooms are set up, how they perceive learning, how they talk to each other, how they behave, and how they aren't concerned about learning.	Over time, they learned how to manage a classroom, became more culturally aware through engagement, and adapted emotionally.	The study did not explicitly detail this process.	Provide specific guidance or advice for overseas teachers operating in the real world.
Harrison-Reid, 2025	Differences in student conduct, school culture, classroom atmosphere, and accountability; pressure from tests and grades; and feelings of isolation and loss of identity due to the absence of cultural peers are significant challenges faced by overseas teachers.	Teachers wanted to fit in and join school life by making friends with other students and working together in a school culture.	Not explicitly detailed in the study.	Not explicitly detailed in the study.
Ralph, A. A., 2024	Stress from relocation, high housing costs, being away from family, culture shock from discipline, students not caring, problems with accents and communication, a lot of work, paperwork, IEPs, a new curriculum, and the school's culture.	Teachers sought help from coworkers and administrators, changed how they taught, learned about language and culture, kept in touch with family, and showed strength and adaptability.	Some of the strategies used are differentiation, using IEP-driven data, flexible grouping, mentorship, AVID technology integration, accent correction and code-switching, cultural exchange, behavior systems like the 3 Cs and card system, and continuous reflection.	Teachers should receive support from administrators, teachers, students, and induction programs; better cultural training; and mentoring from experienced J-1s.

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Lanoy, J. A. T., & Idul, M. M. (2025)	Transition was "long and scary," "not easy," and "overwhelming." Students needed time to adjust to being open and informal, as well as to new standards, evidence-based assessments, technology-based and differentiated instruction, various accents, and new social norms.	Being open-minded, taking things one step at a time, not taking them personally, learning about American culture, getting better at communicating, making friends, being positive, taking breaks to travel, and connecting with the Filipino community.	Learning management systems, instructional software, digital assessments, repetition, conversational fluency, building relationships, performance projects, inquiry and collaboration, differentiated instruction, questioning, and reflective tasks.	Support from mentors, instructional coaches, colleagues, interventionists, administrators, PLCs, and email guidance, as well as working with colleagues, receiving constant feedback, and having non-evaluative, helpful leadership, is essential.
Trinidad, A. G., 2025	Identity mismatch, language stigma, inadequate induction, curriculum misalignment, additional non-instructional responsibilities, and uncertainty about race and belonging are all contributing factors.	The reliance on mentors, colleagues, family, and community, along with flexibility, resilience, and relationship-based teaching, is crucial in rebuilding professional identity.	Relationship-based management, cultural materials, mentorship learning, and cultural ambassadorship are utilized to bridge cultural gaps.	Essential components include strong mentorship, equitable workloads, a clear induction process, pertinent professional development, and institutional support for visa, family, and daily life systems.
Pennington & Tracy, 2022	Culture shock, homesickness, emotional distress, financial strain, heavy paperwork, long hours, language-related stress, disrespect from students and parents, and a sense of being overwhelmed.	Flexibility, self-reflection, resilience, determination, trust, inner strength, learning to ask for help, and relying on support are all crucial.	The implementation of flexibility, reflective practice, setting clear learning expectations, and adapting classroom and school practices are crucial.	Leaders listen, build trust, reach out consistently, and provide support when teachers hide struggles.
Rosales, R. R., 2024	Classroom management, cultural differences, idioms and school language confusion, unfamiliar curriculum protocols, and difficulties adjusting to new standards and procedures.	Despite challenges, they arrived at work, pushed through them, relied on their strength and determination, and kept getting better at their job.	Their cultural background, multilingual proficiency, migratory experiences, and the integration of Filipino and U.S. methodologies helped them convey narratives, cultivate empathy, and assist diverse learners.	The program includes cultural orientation, professional development, coaching, mentorship, language support, lobbying, certification support, targeted induction, and inclusive policies.
Merritt, L., 2024	Life-logistics challenges include housing, transportation, finances, emotional isolation, missing family, new educational system, assessment-driven curriculum, jargon, and cultural differences in language and social norms.	Survived being alone, stayed in touch with family, viewed being alone as an accomplishment, relied on emotional strength, and continued teaching.	Changing the communication style between Spanish and English, speaking up when upset, adjusting to silence standards, and altering your body language and interpersonal interactions.	School staff, principals, the central office, and partner organizations can help with housing, transportation, furniture, curriculum direction, paperwork, airport pickup, and other basic necessities.

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Calbi & Diano, 2025	Classroom management, authority, discipline, school-wide behavior policies, aligning lessons with standards and pacing, timing/assessments, parent engagement, and communication norms.	Clear routines, consistent communication, gradual authority building, reflective practice, collaboration, professional development, observation, mentor guidance, culturally appropriate communication, personal learning communities, and a growth mindset.	The lesson plans have been modified to align with the standards, incorporating inquiry-based learning, fostering collaboration, promoting reflective practice, and modifying interaction patterns.	Mentorship, collaboration with administrators and colleagues, professional networks, PD, culturally responsive induction, and holistic support for management, curriculum, parent communication, and administrative navigation.
Gomez-Lange, H. R., 2024	Cultural and language differences, new curriculum standards and methods, communication with non-verbal or Spanish-speaking students, writing IEPs, and different communication styles and expectations.	Talking with students and teachers, workshops, reading about cultures, learning language through media, support from bilingual aides, online searching, and collegial relationships.	Modified tests, student-centered and inclusive practices, technology use, interactive storytelling, and bilingual communication.	PD and workshops, mentorship, bilingual aides, collegial networks, and administrator recognition.

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Appendix B. Quality Appraisal of Included Studies (Adapted CASP-Style Framework)

Study (Author, Year)	Clear Aim	Appropriate Qualitative Design	Sampling Described	Data Collection Clear	Analytic Transparency	Data–Claim Coherence	Appraisal Summary
Tatel, 2021	Yes	Yes (Case Study)	Yes (15 teachers)	Yes (interviews, surveys)	Moderate	Strong	The design and data were well-described, the analysis procedures were briefly described, and the findings were clearly linked to the data.
Rathinam, 2024	Yes	Yes (Phenomenology)	Yes (17 teachers)	Yes (interviews, reflexive notes)	Moderate	Strong	The methods and sampling are clear, the thematic analysis is generally described, and there is sufficient linkage between themes and purpose.
Harrison-Reid, 2025	Yes	Yes (Qualitative interviews)	Yes	Yes	Moderate	Strong	Rich thematic findings; analytic steps summarized.
Ralph, 2024	Yes	Yes (Hermeneutic Phenomenology)	Yes (10 teachers)	Yes (interviews, journals)	Strong	Strong	There is a clear analytic framework and interpretive process, and there is strong coherence between data and claims.
Lanoy & Idul, 2025	Yes	Yes (Phenomenology)	Yes (7 teachers)	Yes	Moderate	Strong	The design and themes are clear, and the analytical steps are briefly described.
Trinidad, 2025	Yes	Yes (Phenomenology)	Yes (18 teachers)	Yes (interviews)	Strong	Strong	Appraised from full methods and findings; detailed coding process with strong linkage between themes and data.
Pennington & Tracy, 2022	Yes	Yes (Portraiture)	Yes (3 teachers)	Yes	Strong	Strong	Deep narrative method with clear analytic logic and strong data–claim alignment.
Rosales, 2024	Yes	Yes (Interpretive interactionism)	Yes	Yes	Strong	Strong	Clear theoretical framing, analytic strategy, and rich linkage between narratives and

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							claims.
Merritt, 2024	Yes	Yes (Phenomenology)	Yes	Yes	Moderate	Strong	The design and findings are clear, and the analytical description is adequate, albeit not highly detailed.
Calbi & Diano, 2025	Yes	Yes (Descriptive phenomenology)	Yes (17 teachers)	Yes	Strong	Strong	The analysis follows very clear steps (Colaizzi method), and there is a strong connection between the evidence and the theme.
Gomez-Lange, 2024	Yes	Yes (Phenomenology)	Yes (15 teachers)	Yes	Strong	Strong	Systematic coding process and strong alignment between data, themes, and conclusions.