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## Research Article

### Navigating The Cross-Cultural Challenges of the Philippine Contingent in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS): An Ethnographic Study

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#### ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study investigates into the cross-cultural challenges faced by 23 Filipino Individual Police Officers (IPOs) serving in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). This research employs qualitative methods, including structured interviews and participant observation, to explore the impact of cultural differences on performance, communication, and interpersonal relationships within a diverse peacekeeping environment.

This research explores three pivotal inquiries: What shared cultural insights do Filipino IPOs recognize in UNMISS? What particular obstacles are they encountering? What effects do these challenges have on their performance?

The findings reveal that cultural differences—especially in language, communication styles, and work ethics—resulted in misunderstandings and operational challenges, yet they also fostered growth. Filipino IPOs showcased remarkable adaptability, patience, and resilience, enhancing collaboration and elevating cultural sensitivity.

The research suggests implementing focused strategies, including pre-deployment training, psychological evaluations centered on cultural adaptability, and mentorship initiatives. This research offers valuable insights into the intricacies of intercultural dynamics within peacekeeping missions. It highlights the critical need to support peacekeepers, thereby boosting their effectiveness and showcasing Filipino cultural values on the international stage.

**Keywords:** *Cross-Cultural Challenges, Communication, United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), Philippine Contingent, Ethnographic Study, Peacekeeping Operations, Cultural Adjustments, Coping Strategies, Communication Process, Qualitative Research, Individual Police Officers (IPOs)*

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## Background of the Study

The United Nations conducts peacekeeping operations, such as the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), to stabilize regions affected by conflict and promote long-term peace. The missions consist of international teams dedicated to the protection of civilians, the delivery of humanitarian aid, the support of peace agreements, and the monitoring of human rights violations (UN SCR 2729, 2024).

South Sudan is situated in the northeastern region of Africa. The region encompasses diverse ecosystems, such as savannas, swamps, and rainforests, which sustain numerous wildlife species. South Sudan achieved independence from Sudan in 2011. The population, primarily of African descent and frequently adhering to Christianity or animism, has historically experienced conflict with the predominantly Arab and Muslim government of northern Sudan. The capital is Juba.

UNMISS functions within a culturally intricate context, where addressing cultural differences is essential to its mission. The Philippine contingent is recognized for its professionalism and contributes significantly to this effort.

The Philippines maintains a historical association with the United Nations. Prior to the formal establishment of the UN, the Philippines contributed to the formulation of its foundational principles and was a signatory of the 1942 UN Declaration, which subsequently influenced the 1945 UN Charter (United Nations, 2024).

The Philippines commenced participation in peacekeeping missions in the 1960s, particularly during the Congo Crisis via the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC). Filipino peacekeepers were among the initial contributors to UN operations, establishing a foundation for subsequent participation (Morada, 2013).

Executive Order No. 97 was issued to facilitate the Philippines' active participation in UN peacekeeping efforts. This order specifies the coordination protocols among various government agencies, including the DFA, DND, and DILG (Philippine Gazette, 2024).

The Philippine National Police (PNP) established guidelines for the deployment of police personnel overseas via Memorandum

Circular No. 2010-007. This guarantees that the selection process is grounded in merit and equity, positioning qualified officers in international positions (PNP, 2010).

UNMISS currently comprises 702 Individual Police Officers (IPOs) representing 49 nations. The group comprises 487 men and 215 women (UNSC Report, 2024). The Philippines has deployed a total of 23 police officers in three contingents: 10 on November 28, 2023; 5 on February 28, 2024; and 8 on April 21, 2024. The officers exemplify the nation's commitment to international peacekeeping efforts.

This study examines the distinct challenges encountered by Filipino IPOs in South Sudan and their strategies for addressing these challenges.

Since the late 1980s, the United Nations has engaged in global peacekeeping and peace enforcement efforts. Research indicates that peacekeepers encounter various challenges, such as restricted capabilities, ambiguous guidelines, and intricate organizational structures (Taylor & Smith, 2019). Environmental factors, including political changes, migration, refugee crises, global health threats such as COVID-19, climate change, and sustainability issues, contribute significantly to the burden (Mingst et al., 2022).

Peacekeeping is frequently associated with development objectives. Although both have evolved, peacekeeping missions typically emphasize short-term security over long-term development (Gledhill, Caplan & Meiske, 2021).

UNMISS was established to promote peace and stability in South Sudan. Peacekeepers encounter challenges such as local political conflicts, inadequate local institutions, and discrepancies between mandates and available resources (Day et al., 2019; Jochemsen, 2022). Research indicates that UNMISS faces difficulties in civilian protection, attributed to various internal and external challenges (Eyanae, 2022). While the mission has advanced peace, human rights, and development, the fundamental causes of conflict persist unresolved (Opiyo et al., 2024).

The UN encounters challenges at the strategic level, including leadership, global power dynamics, and funding.

Operational-level issues encompass the preparedness of contingents and the strategies employed in conflicts.

At the tactical level, issues pertain to cooperation, discipline, and cultural understanding—critical considerations for field peacekeepers (Tuvdendarjaa, 2022).

Challenges emerge from the interpretation of roles by peacekeepers and their interactions with other contingents (Ruffa & Rietjens, 2023). Cultural composition and teamwork significantly influence mission success (Bove et al., 2022). Peacekeepers from Kenya and South Africa have exchanged insights regarding risks, stress, and personnel shortages, while also receiving acknowledgment for their contributions (Kiplagat, 2019; Visagie et al., 2022).

Numerous studies indicate the presence of gender imbalance and incidents of sexual misconduct within peacekeeping missions. Female participation is often lower at the onset of new missions due to elevated risks and uncertainties (Tidblad-Lundholm, 2020). Additionally, initiatives aimed at increasing the representation of women may inadvertently impose pressure on female peacekeepers to demonstrate their value (Wilén, 2020).

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) represent significant issues, especially in missions such as MINUSTAH in Haiti and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Vahedi et al., 2019; Bartels et al., 2021). These issues are frequently shaped by poverty, insufficient oversight, and the power dynamics between peacekeepers and local populations (Jennings, 2019; Horne et al., 2020).

Effective peacekeeping necessitates robust cross-cultural communication and cultural competence. Examining the impact of culture on behavior, beliefs, and communication is essential (O'Donoghue, 2024). Theories proposed by Hall regarding high and low context cultures, along with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, elucidate how individuals from diverse backgrounds perceive the world, thereby influencing interactions among peacekeepers (Kyprianou, 2024; Wale, 2024).

Cultural awareness is essential for peacekeepers in both planning and operations, as well as in building community trust (Tomforde, 2010). Strategic communication that is timely,

relevant, and interactive can enhance the effectiveness and credibility of peacekeeping efforts (Sherman & Trithart, 2021). The development of intercultural communication skills facilitates the management of cultural differences and the establishment of functional relationships in diverse environments (Njoroge, 2024).

Research highlights the importance of ethical sensitivity in conflict zones, particularly for local researchers (Macaspac, 2020), and illustrates how folk religiosity influences social unity and identity in regions such as the Philippines (Macaranas, 2021). Filipino communication styles tend to be indirect, polite, and prioritize respect and harmony (Irwin, 2020).

Migration and acculturation significantly influence identity, behavior, and well-being. The dynamics are significant for migrants and host communities, particularly in multicultural missions (Andronic & Constantin, 2022). Inadequately addressed cultural differences may result in conflicts among peacekeeping teams, thereby impacting both performance and morale (Patry, 2024).

Cross-cultural psychology examines the influence of cultural backgrounds on thoughts and behaviors, highlighting the significance of recognizing these differences in peacekeeping contexts (Shirayev & Levy, 2020). Holohan (2019) identified a desire among peacekeepers for enhanced training in soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and cultural sensitivity.

Leadership in peacekeeping is frequently influenced by international political dynamics. Countries that provide military and financial support often exert greater influence over leadership appointments, potentially undermining merit-based selection processes (Oksamytna et al., 2020).

Although numerous studies address general and operational challenges in peacekeeping, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the specific cross-cultural experiences of the Philippine Contingent in UNMISS. This study seeks to address the existing gap by examining the experiences of Filipino peacekeepers as they encounter and manage cultural challenges in South Sudan, thereby contributing to the expanding body of literature on intercultural competence in international missions.

## Statement of the Problem

The study aims to navigate the cross-cultural challenges of the Philippine Contingent in the UNMISS. Specifically, it seeks answers to the following:

1. What cross-cultural shared knowledge is revealed among the participants of UNMISS as observed by the Filipino Individual Police Officers (IPOs)?
2. What challenges are faced by the Filipino IPOs?
3. How do these challenges impact their performance as IPOs?

## Theoretical Support

John W. Creswell, in his book "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches," provides a comprehensive overview of ethnographic research, which is a qualitative research method focused on exploring cultural phenomena. Ethnography involves the researcher immersing themselves in a community or group to observe and interact with participants in their natural environment (Creswell, 2009).

Accordingly, ethnographic research involves the systematic study of people and cultures from the inside, focusing on the meanings that individuals assign to their experiences within their cultural context. The approach is deeply rooted in theories of cultural anthropology and sociology, emphasizing participant observation and immersive fieldwork to gather rich, qualitative data (Creswell, 2009).

Creswell's discussion on ethnography provides a robust framework for understanding how cultural contexts can influence behaviors and social interactions. This is particularly relevant if your study involves examining the intricate interplay of cultures within international peacekeeping operations, such as those in UNMISS. Ethnographic methods can offer valuable insights into how cultural competence and interactions among diverse groups of peacekeepers shape their experiences and effectiveness in such missions.

Ethnography is grounded in various theoretical frameworks that guide how researchers approach their studies. Creswell (2009) emphasizes that ethnographic research is rooted

in cultural anthropology and sociology. The central aim is to understand the meanings and behaviors of individuals within a specific cultural context. Ethnographers rely on theories of culture, social interaction, and symbolic interactionism to interpret their observations and interactions within the community they are studying.

One of the key components of ethnographic research, as highlighted by Creswell, is participant observation. This method requires researchers to engage directly with the community, participating in their daily activities while systematically observing and recording data. This immersive approach helps researchers gain a deep understanding of the cultural practices, social structures, and interpersonal dynamics within the group (Creswell, 2009).

Creswell also discusses the importance of reflexivity and ethics in ethnographic research. Reflexivity involves the researcher being aware of their own biases and the impact their presence might have on the participants and the data collected. Ethical considerations are paramount, ensuring that researchers obtain informed consent, respect participants' privacy, and avoid harm (Creswell, 2009).

Hall's theory of culture claims that many people show bias when engaging in intercultural exchanges. Many see others by the criteria of their own culture and values while not looking at how culture diversity contributes to conflicts. In relation to the study, many cultures, especially in the initial phases of the mission, would see their culture as the only right one, and many times expect others to adjust to them. Even Filipino contingents are guilty of this bias. This research contributed in how these biases were understood, how cultures navigate or interacted with these cultural biases, and ultimately how cultures have come up with understanding with each other.

## Research Methodology

The methodology section details the research design, participants, selection criteria, research techniques, research instrument and validation process, data gathering procedure, data analysis, and ethical considerations employed in the study.

## Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design using an ethnographic approach to explore the cross-cultural challenges observed by the Philippine Contingent in UNMISS. Specifically, this study employed ethnography. According to Cresswell (2007), ethnography focuses on an “entire cultural group.” In this context, the culture pertains to the 23 Philippine contingent in UNMISS.

## Research Participants

The participants of this study were the 23 members of the Philippine Contingent deployed in MHQ and across various field offices, including Juba, Wau, Kuajok, Malakal, Aweil, Bor, Rumbek, and Bentiu.

## Selection Criteria

The selection of the participants was based on complete enumeration and purposive sampling. The criterion for selection includes:

### Criteria for participation:

Those eligible must:

- Be current police officers of the Philippine National Police.
- Be currently deployed in UNMISS.
- Have completed at least two (2) months in the mission area.
- Be between 30 – 55 years old.

### Anticipated time commitment:

- 30 – 45 minutes interview whether face-to-face or online platform, agreed upon time and location.
- Debriefing email will be sent to review the interview transcript and provide feedback.

## Research Technique

The primary research techniques used in this study were interviews and observations.

## Research Instrument and Validation

The interview guide questions talked about the following:

1. Cross-cultural shared knowledge. Questions focus on understanding the cultural similarities and differences observed among Filipino IPOs.

2. Challenges faced by Filipino IPOs. Questions focus to uncover specific challenges encountered by Filipino IPOs in UNMISS, related to cultural differences and their implications.
3. Impact on Performance. Questions explore how cultural challenges affect performance and effectiveness of Filipino IPOs in their roles as they discharge their work.

## Validation of the Guide Questions

The guide questions were validated by three (3) subject matter experts who will provide recommendations to improve their clarity and relevance.

## Transcript

The transcripts of the recorded interviews with the 22 Filipino IPOs were validated by a peer review to ensure accuracy and completeness.

## Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection involved conducting face-to-face or online interviews with Filipino IPOs in a private and neutral setting within the mission premises. Interviews will be recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Interviews – interviews were conducted until data saturation is achieved. Ensuring that no new information is being revealed.

Observation – the researcher conducted observations over a period of seven (7) months, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the cultural dynamics and challenges faced by the participants.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis followed Creswell (2007) approach to qualitative data analysis. Each research question was analyzed through thematic coding, identifying patterns and themes related to cross-cultural interactions, challenges, and their impact on performance.

In order to come up with trustworthy results, the answers of the participants were first inspected through open coding or “breaking down into categories” the answers per section. After categorizing, the data were subjected to axial coding. Each category must possess unique theme to become a single concept or

unit for discussion. Interrelatedness answers were lumped into single category. Then, the most relevant categories or themes were selected as bases for major discussions and development of core concepts.

The author made these processes in order to, first, establish credibility of the findings. All answers were documented through voice recording with corresponding photo ops as long as the party has approved the latter act. Second, the author also diligently looked for related studies or literatures to back up the answers and discovered concepts or theories. This is to ensure that the findings are applicable in other context, and not just in UNMISS. The third is the pursuit of dependability. It is expected that when the same study questions are used in other UN missions, there shall be expected consistency and replicability of findings. They may not be necessarily the same but the answers might be solidifying on the same themes. Finally, the answers were analyzed and categorized without the bias. All positive and negative answers were included in the categorization and analysis of the data.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and addressing any potential risks associated with participation in the study. The research will be conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and approved by the Ethics Review Committee, DLSUD.

First and foremost, participation in the research will be entirely voluntary. Everyone invited for inclusion will be presented with a meticulously crafted consent form and privacy

notice, which seamlessly integrated into the online or face-to-face interview process. Furthermore, the aims and objectives of the interviews will be communicated transparently, leaving no room for ambiguity.

Prior to engaging in the research activities, each participant will be explicitly asked for their informed consent, granting them the freedom to participate or decline without any fear of consequences. Flexibility will be a cornerstone of the approach, with participants given the liberty to select a suitable timeframe for interview completion, ensuring minimal disruption to their daily routines.

At every stage of interaction, participants retained the option to discontinue their participation should they experience any discomfort or inconvenience. Lastly, the collected data will be handled with the utmost confidentiality, with a commitment to use it solely for the intended research purpose and to prevent any disclosure that could potentially reveal individual responses.

This ethical framework underscores the unwavering dedication to upholding the rights and privacy of all participants, preserving the integrity of the research process, and adhering to the highest ethical standards throughout this study.

### Results and Discussions

The results are organized according to the specific research questions:

***SOP #1: What cross-cultural shared knowledge is revealed among the participants of UNMISS as observed by the Filipino IPOs?***

***Shared Belief and Communication Practices.***

*Table 1. Summary of Shared Belief and Communication Practices among UNMISS Participants as Observed by Filipino IPOs*

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Common respect and politeness	18	78.26%
Differences in communication style	5	44.44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

The categorization of answers was 18 for “common respect and politeness” and 5 for “differences in communication style.” Although

variations existed, respect and politeness still dominated the communications process.

### **Common Respect and Politeness**

Although individual police officers (IPOs) from around the globe participating in the UN Mission in South Sudan came from various cultures, shared beliefs still existed. The main answer of the Filipino IPOs on the question of observed shared beliefs was common respect and politeness. The various manifestations of respect include “respect diversity and human rights, and sensitivity towards gender, culture and religion” (Participants 6, 20). Respect also comes from “accepting others’ point of view” (Participant 17). An explicit representation of respect was given by Participant 22: “I have had the opportunity to work with people from various cultural backgrounds in my current assignment in UNMISS. We participated in a community project that required cross-functional collaboration with other UN agencies. This experience taught me how to effectively communicate and build relationships with people from different cultures. I gained an understanding of cultural differences that helped me build trust and respect with diverse team members.” The answer showed that aside from preconceived notions of other cultures, respect also comes from understanding cultural differences.

Being respectful also implied politeness to other nationalities. The Filipino IPOs told observations of other nationalities as “well-mannered and professional” (Participant 7), “greet others through handshakes” (Participant 8), and “being polite especially to ladies” (Participant 9).

### **Differences in communication styles**

Although expected, majority of the participants answered that foreign contingents in UNMISS have differences in communication styles. English is the main language for communication. But how one delivers the message usually creates the difference. Asians usually have the same way of delivering words, while those from other continents deliver their words differently (Participant 11). There are also salient observations such as whereas we Pinoys talk indirectly, “other nationalities usually talk straight and to the point” (Participant 14). Differences in communication styles also emerge out of the following: using of same words but

having different meaning in other cultures (Participant 10), use of strong words for emphasis (Participant 21), and use of non-verbal communication (Participant 12). With these differences in communication, Participant 9 warned: “In communicating with other nationalities we should always be polite and respectful especially with the ladies because some have different cultures and beliefs. They may be offended if we do not be cautious about how we talk and communicate with other nationalities.” On the same manner, Filipinos must also be open-minded about how other nationalities talk as they were brought from another cultures and environments different from the upbringing of Filipinos.

These are also the observations of the author. “During a joint patrol briefing, officers from India, Nepal, and together with me showed mutual respect for hierarchy, allowing senior officers to speak first. Although the work environment in the mission area is rankless, we practice on honoring seniority, leading to smoother interactions during discussion.”

“During a briefing session, officers from Norway, Sweden, and Finland, exhibited a shared value of punctuality and structured communication, which led to efficient and timely meetings which I have attended also.”

“Everywhere I go and meet people (everyone), they will greet you and ask how are you?. Even with the locals (south Sudanese). I use the dispatch bus to commute every day going to the office and been meeting a lot of nationalities. This is very common. They will also stop and tell you that they are okay.”

The foregoing discussions showed the importance of being respectful with other contingents to maintain harmony in the missions. Politeness strategies, as Irwin (2020) acknowledged, were resorted to by Filipinos to avoid conflict and to maintain social harmony. The issues of rankless communication and relationship reflected the hierarchical structure in which Filipinos have been organized. The differences in communication styles were also recognized by Patry (2024) as challenges to be overcome. However, patience and understanding are necessary traits that Filipino IPOs must have during their missions.

### Common Values or Beliefs Shared

To further elucidate cross-cultural shared knowledge, the researcher asked her fellow IPOs the question: “Are there any common

values or beliefs shared by your colleagues from different countries?” Table 2 shows the summary of categorization.

*Table 2. Common Values or Beliefs Shared by Colleagues from Other Countries*

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Existence of common values, respect and spirit of friendship	20	86.96
Different values	3	13.04
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Existence of Common Values, Respect and Spirit of Friendship

Analyses of the answers showed existence of common values, respect and spirit of friendship among colleagues from other countries, with 20 participants answering with this theme. These were “similar work ethics (punctual, hardworking and reliable) among Asians” (Participant 10) valuing religion (Participant 11), “respecting ideas from different backgrounds” (Participant 12); and “commitment to peace and security, respect for human rights and dignity, professionalism and integrity, teamwork and collaboration, adaptability and resilience” (Participant 15).

The answer of Participant 18 is worth quoting for its clarity and comprehensiveness. The common values among IPOs are: “1. Dedication to Peacekeeping - All contingents share a strong commitment to maintaining peace and security in conflict zones. This dedication is a core value that transcends national boundaries and unites peacekeepers in their mission.

2. Commitment to Service - A strong sense of duty and commitment to serving the international community and contributing to global peace and security is a common value among peacekeepers. 3. Respect for Diversity -

A common belief in the importance of respecting cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity is evident. This respect is essential for effective collaboration and coexistence in a multicultural environment.” Moreover, the common beliefs are: “1. Belief in Multilateralism - Peacekeepers often believe in the power of multilateral efforts and international cooperation to address global challenges and conflicts.

2. Hope for Positive Change - There is a shared belief that their efforts can lead to

positive changes and improvements in the lives of people affected by conflict.

3. The Importance of Rule of Law - A common belief in upholding the rule of law and ensuring justice is a guiding principle for many peacekeepers.

4. Commitment to Learning and Adaptation - Peacekeepers believe in the importance of continuous learning and adapting to new challenges and environments. This includes learning from each other and sharing best practices.

5. Value of Human Dignity - There is a fundamental belief in the inherent dignity of every individual, which drives the commitment to protect civilians and support vulnerable populations.”

Specific common values were also answered by several participants. These were respect (5 participants) and spirit of friendship (3 participants). The manifestation of respect was narrated by Participant 17: “We easily smile and that breaks the ice of the situation. We look at life as a whole positively, maybe it has something to do with our faith. Our readiness to invite others to come and eat at our table no matter how modest and simple we have, reminds me of my mom, she invites everyone to her table.” The narrative reflects how Filipinos respect everyone by sharing meals regardless of their abundance or scarcity.

The spirit of friendship was manifested on the following answer by Participant 7: “Majority of the UNPOL have the tendency of joining together with their fellow countrymen or neighboring countries (i.e. Asian, European, African and others) as part of cultural confidence or feeling of belongingness. Such observable action of the fellow UNPOL is similar to our distinct values of “Kabayan” system (strong bond



of Filipinos in Abroad).” Differences in origin was not a barrier for the spirit of friendship to bond UN police officers.

Different Values

However, three (3) participants observed that there were distinct cultural values that set aside other cultures from others. These were “not naturally showing of common beliefs and values of contingents during interactions” due to UN regulations (Participant 6) and other countries not allowing handshakes especially with ladies (Participant 9). Participant 16 complained: “There are people, magaling sila sa pananalita, pero pagdating sa trabaho, magulang din ang iba” (Some are good in words, but when it comes to work, some take advantage of others.)

These are the observations of the author. “Many officers from Asian and African countries, such as Nepal, India, Gambia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Ghana, shared a strong sense of community and familial loyalty. I have observed these traits during Wednesday night and previous medal pinning ceremonies I have attended.”

“I have observed that embracing and kissing are prominent with Africans and Europeans unlike with Asians they are not used of greetings like this.”

Amidst the perceived differences in values among contingents in the UNMISS, what stood

out was the understanding of other culture to foster friendship and to avoid conflicts. Most of the time, different contingents see diversities, but in fact they were differences borne from the different lens used by the contingents. The importance of respect stood out again because that opens up avenues for communication and building trust and confidence. Although there were differences (like kissing as common or not practiced among people within a culture), conflicts do not arise because the practice is not imposed. This could be related to the concept of cultural competence as discussed by Chiu and Shi (2019). They asserted that cross-cultural competence may be defined as a constellation of traits-- personal elements typical of certain individual-- or as a type of skills-- degree of learnedness about the acquisition, usage, and construction of cross-cultural knowledge. Hence, Filipino IPOs must be oriented on other countries’ cultures before being deployed in the missions.

Shared Cultural Beliefs and Values Helping Teamwork and Cooperation in Workplace

With these observed shared cultural values and beliefs, it was assumed that these would help teamwork and cooperation in the workplace. The following are the themes culled from the answers.

Table 3. Shared Cultural Beliefs and Values Helping Teamwork and Cooperation in Workplace

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Understanding among the different contingents	17	86.96
Good working environment	6	13.04
Total	23	100%

Understanding among the Different Contingents

The first theme that emerged from the related codes from the answers was that there was understanding among the different contingents, as answered by 17 participants. The following were the manifestations of cooperation due to shared culture and beliefs: “easier to open up to people and speak one’s mind” (Participant 2); “common understanding, dedication and commitment to a set objective,

direction and common goal” (Participant 6); and understanding among common neighbors like Asians (Participant 16). Cooperation due to shared values and beliefs was clearly explained by Participant 22: “I believe that culture and values play a pivotal role in performing our sworn duty as IPOs and served as motivation in achieving job satisfaction. In the workplace, when we are aligned with the Office’s values and mission, definitely we are more productive and motivated. I appreciate that my current

work assignment because it values diversity, equity, and inclusion. And as someone who is part of creating an inclusive and welcoming workplace, I can easily mingle with people coming from different nation.”

### **Good Working Environment**

The other positive impact of sharing cultural values and beliefs was good working environment, as answered by six (6) participants. These are specifically observed in work synchronization (Participant 8), and harmony in the workplace (Participants 13, 14 and 21). As narrated by Participant 7: “Basically, the discussed shared values help in the ease of doing work and accomplishing particular tasks due to common interest, similar work ethics, and less communication barriers based on our personal experience with Asian UNPOL.”

These are the observations of the author. “During the leadership retreat, I have been with a team of Indonesian, Bosnian, Brazilian, Nigerian in the Reporting Team. The team that I worked with I observed that they are result-oriented and respect deadlines. Ideas during

discussions are respected among us. Everyone was open to dividing tasks and was easy to go along with.”

The shared cultural values and beliefs are necessary starting points for understanding and cooperations. They were also considered as factors for better working conditions in the mission area. In the field note, the key terms were respecting ideas. The division of tasks also led to better working results. These results were aligned to the claim of Tam and Milfont (2020).

“A cross-cultural outlook enables us to assume and understand that culture forms one of the potential bases for variations. With this perspective, researchers can examine whether psychological processes regarding humans' interactions with their environments vary or not across populations and cultures.”

### **Cultural Understanding Helping Resolve a Conflict**

The participants were asked: “Can you share an example where cultural understanding helped resolve a conflict in your workplace?”

*Table 4. How Cultural Understanding Help Resolve Workplace Conflict*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Patience in understanding the differences	18	78.26%
No answer	5	21.74%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Patience in Understanding the Differences**

The theme that emerged from this question was, in order to resolve a conflict or to mitigate conflict, there must be patience in understanding the differences among each other, with the majority of the 18 echoing this theme. Three of the participants shared vivid example that supports this claim:

Participant 3: “An example would be the common understanding in the difference of accent in language gives each other more patience in trying to understand what is being said or talk about during work related interactions and meetings thereby avoiding conflict or any form of mistreatment in the workplace.”

Participant 9: “Some other nationalities do not eat cow meat especially the Hindu people

because they worship the cow so when situation came that you will eat with them during breakfast, lunch or dinner do not bring cow meat to show respect to them or else they will say that you are rude and not respect them at all.”

Participant 19: “One example is when I was lecturing and teaching one of my Muslim colleagues on how to do the weekly report, she ask me to stop even though we still have a lot to discuss. She ask me to excuse her because she has to pray. Instead of judging her of not cooperating, I considered her religion and culture and understand that her prayer should come first above the lecture that we are having. That instance avoided conflict.”

These are also the observation of the author. “Respect for diversity has always been appraised to everyone, with this, I feel that we are all prepared that there will be differences with characters and attitudes. But despite that, I have observed that some conflicts in the workplace still exists. Some nationalities are a bit of laid back and don’t like to cooperate sometimes, but Europeans are seen to be more committed and hard working too.”

“There was a misunderstanding between Bosnian and a Ghanian particularly about a phone call placed by the former to the latter. The latter unintentionally hanged the phone which started the arguments. The Ghanian went to the office because the Bosnian colleague have raised the concern, so his attention was called. They had an argument, but in the long run have resolved the issue. Both were humble enough to talk it out.”

Patience in understanding the differences was the key proposed to avoid conflicts among the different cultures. As shown above, these

differences could be manifested in the language, eating of food, prayer during the day, and even etiquettes in making and receiving phone calls. The recommendation of O'Donoghue (2024) was appropriate for these findings on cultural understanding resolving conflicts: “with effective implementation of cross-cultural elimination, organizations can eliminate misunderstanding and build strong relations with individuals from different origins.”

**SOP #2: What challenges are faced by the Filipino IPOs?**

**Experiencing Misunderstanding due to Cultural Differences**

One of the main sources of misunderstanding among UN contingents is cultural differences. Many concepts or aspects are misunderstood due to this concept of cultural lens. Participants were asked: “Have you experienced any misunderstanding due to cultural differences?”

Table 5. On Whether Participants Experienced Misunderstanding due to Cultural Differences

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
No	15	65.22%
Yes	8	34.78%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

**No Experience in Cultural Misunderstanding**

Majority (15 out of 22) of the participants answered that they had not experienced misunderstanding due to cultural differences. The assumption is that Filipino IPOs have already pre-conceived notions on the different cultures and behaviors they would be dealing with. Whenever there were misunderstandings, those would be interpreted as normal as they have already anticipated this.

**Experienced Cultural Misunderstanding**

Seven (7) of the participants expressed that they had experienced cultural misunderstanding. These were in the aspects of adjusting and solving the problems with the other IPOs (Participant 8), in preparing reports (Participant 9), jealousy as some Filipinos were being favored by other contingents (Participant 13), close-mindedness of some groups to suggestions

(Participant 18), and differing point of views (Participant 20). Participant 22 succinctly shared the issue on time management as cultural issue: “As an IPO, I had experienced some cultural differences and really affect my work. For instance, the concern on time management varies significantly between cultures. Some of my colleagues, they were punctual and started the meetings exactly at the scheduled time and they were “time-oriented people.” In contrast to that, I have also other colleagues usually place a higher value on relationships and flexibility, they were event-oriented people. So, misunderstanding arises because a time-oriented colleagues perceived a colleague from an event-oriented culture as unprofessional or disrespectful for being late.”

Here are the observations of the author. “I have experienced frustration when the indirect

suggestion was interpreted as indecisiveness by a Nigerian colleague in my work.”

“French and English style in communication somehow gives confusion in the meaning and use of words. Upstanding and stand up have the same meaning, but we are not used of hearing. I remember we were given announcement that we will have work if there will be electric in the office instead of electricity. You will encounter this everyday in the mission.”

“There is also colleague who can speak very well English but has problem of writing it which sometimes creates confusion.”

“I successfully navigated a cultural misunderstanding with a Malawin colleague during a discussion with task by actively listening and seeking clarification, which in turn improved mutual respect and cooperation with her.”

Although there were less Filipino IPOs who had experienced misunderstanding due to

cultural differences, there were still observations on the manifestations of confusions. These were on work, jealousy, being closed-minded and time management. The field notes showed that cultural misunderstanding was observed in the interpretation of suggestions, use of words, and writing of ideas on paper. On the same note, Abd Razak, et. al. (2018) claimed that the success of the interaction between TNCs from different countries depends on the level of language and cultural competence of the peacekeepers. Hence, again, educating IPOs properly before deployment requires important consideration.

### ***Cultural Challenges Faced in the Roles as Filipino IPO***

The research asked the question: “What cultural challenges do you face in your role as a Filipino IPO?”

*Table 6. Cultural Challenges Faced in the Roles as Filipino IPO*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Differences in beliefs, values and perspectives	10	43.48%
Language differences	9	39.13%
None	4	17.39%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

### ***Differences in beliefs, values and perspectives***

The main theme on cultural challenges pertained to differences in beliefs, values and perspectives, as answered by 10 participants. These were exhibited in the phenomena on the IPO not knowing about the other cultures (Participant 2), differences on religion, dishes, taking pictures, and accents (Participant 6), and superiority complex among Africans (Participant 19).

Participant 9 provided a story on how other cultures look at us Filipinos: “The cultural challenge I face as a Filipino IPO that really happens base on my experience is about another country ask me why Filipino eat cockroach or why eat pagpag or food comes from the garbage and wash and cook again. They say they watch it in you tube and they let me show it. I just answered them politely that not all Filipino do that. But maybe some do that because of poverty and survival.” The answer showed the

power of social media in shaping the narrative about a certain culture (Filipino) using an extreme norm (eating left-overs from the garbage).

### ***Language differences***

The other cultural challenged narrated by majority (9) of the participants was language differences. Specific issues arose due to some nationalities having little understanding on the English language (Participants 8 and 14), too formal interpretation by more egalitarian cultures on the Filipino honorifics (Participant 12), understanding slang (Participant 13); communication styles as direct among Russians, indirect among Filipinos, and authoritative among Africans, and confrontational among others (Participant 20). Observations and recommendations were given by Participant 18: “As Patrol Officer in the Malakal Field Office, language barriers complicate communication with locals, hindering effective dialogue.

Cultural differences in conflict resolution and social norms require sensitivity and adaptation. Additionally, integrating into a multicultural team with diverse backgrounds demands flexibility and open-mindedness. Navigating these challenges necessitates continuous learning, respect for local traditions, and fostering strong relationships with community leaders to enhance cooperation and peacekeeping efforts."

These are the observations of the author. "We Filipinos are used of following instructions, listening to instructions. Although if we will be given tasks we can excellently accomplish it. Other nationalities tend to be boastful but lacks sense of commitment while Europeans and Americans are result-oriented."

"Americans, Africans, and Europeans are straight forward while Asians are more tamed and accustomed to hierarchical respect, adapted well to working with Indian and Nepalese colleagues who shared similar values, facilitating smoother working environment."

It is not only the spoken language that proved to be the main cultural challenge among Filipino IPOs, but more on interpreting what was really being said. The dictions, style, and even pronunciations proved to be difficult to understand in the initial stages. There were also issues of understanding other cultures based only on few or trivial things. In terms of work, there were also differences in orientation. Relatedly, Njoroge's (2024) posited that the "cultivation of intercultural communication skills is crucial to create positive and functional relationships in different cultures. This competence entails trying to understand people's behaviors, ideas, and their perception of life so that different cultures can be dealt with effectively."

### ***Language and Communication Barriers***

The final question under the challenges faced by the Filipino IPOs was: "Have you faced language or communication barriers?"

*Table 7. On Whether Participants Have Faced Language or Communication Barriers*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	20	86.96%
No	3	13.04%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

### ***Faced language and communication barriers***

Majority (20) of the respondents, including the author, answered that they had faced language and communication barriers in their tour as IPO in UNMISS. The common barriers or issues mentioned were some IPOs being not proficient in the English language (Participant 4), not understanding heavily accented language and fast talks (Participants 6 and 7), not familiar with the Arabic language used in South Sudan (15), and misinterpretation of some words by other IPOs (Participant 20). Participant 18 provided a perspective and recommendation on these issues: "Language barriers present a major challenge, making it difficult to communicate effectively with local communities, which is crucial for conflict resolution and intelligence gathering. We must work within a multicultural team, each

member bringing their own communication styles and work ethics. This diversity requires adaptability and open-mindedness to maintain harmony and efficiency. The Filipino contingent must also continuously educate themselves about local customs and conflict dynamics, fostering mutual respect and understanding."

Did not encounter language and communication barriers

Three (3) participants answered that they did not encounter language and communication barriers. The reasons where the participant was a good communicator (Participants 9 and 19), and that everyone was talking in the English language (Participant 21).

These are the author's observations. "The English of some colleagues are hard to understand while English speaking countries are easy to understand."

“The language barrier seemed to be one of the more consistent sources of challenges faced by Filipino IPOs. The language in South Sudan is Arabic. It would help if Filipino IPOs were trained in the language of the country they are going to be assigned before departure. In the field note, even those African speaking English are hard to understand. These findings are related to the claim by Abd Razak, et. al. (2018) who indicated that eradicating barriers to communication improves teamwork, bargaining, and the participation of the public in support of mission achievement.

### ***SOP 3: How do these challenges impact their performance as police officers?***

On How Cultural Challenges Have Helped or Hindered IPOs in their Works

Cultural challenges encountered by the Filipino IPOs were aplenty as exhibited in the previous section. The more relevant question is on the impact of these challenges on performance. In this section, the first question asked was on how cultural challenges have hindered IPOs in their works.

*Table 8. On How Cultural Challenges Have Hindered the IPOs in their Work*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Slowed down procedures due to difficulty in communication	9	39.13%
Enhanced adaptation due to cultural diversity	7	30.43%
Affecting work	4	17.39%
No answer	3	13.04%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### ***Slowed down procedures due to difficulty in communication***

The first major theme or impact based on the coding of answers was slowed down procedures due to the difficulty in communication, with 9 participants having this answer. The examples of slowing down include repeating messages for clarification or clarity (Participant 4), misunderstanding in the meaning of the messages (Participant 6s and 8), differences in communication style (Participants 15, 18 and 22).

#### ***Enhanced adaptation due to cultural diversity***

The second theme was that cultural challenges had enhanced adaptation due to cultural diversity, with seven answers. What this meant was that Filipino IPOs had to adjust quickly to overcome the challenges. Overcoming challenges included observation and proper mindset (Participant 7), learning about other countries, cultures and attitudes (Participants 9 and 17), trust through cultural sensitivity (Participant 12), correcting errors of other IPOs (Participant 14), working in a rankless culture (Participant 19), and being patient and understanding (Participant 20).

#### ***Affecting Work***

Nonetheless, four participants had answered that cultural challenges have the impact of affecting work. Specific manifestations were different attitudes towards time management, punctuality, or deadlines (Participant 5 and 13), being closed-minded and non-accommodating behaviors (Participant 11), increased responsibility due to non-compliance of some IPOs (Participant 3).

These are the author’s observations. “The need to constantly adapt communication styles to fit different cultural norms sometimes slowed me down on decision-making process. Hence, there was a need to quickly adapting to different cultural norms and communication styles in the workplace.”

The main impact of cultural challenges is on the efficiency on the daily tasks or on the overall work performance. The meaning of the words in the communications must be understood first before actions could be made. In the field note, slowing down was due to communication adaptation, and adjusting to different communication styles such as direct and being indirect. Solving this impact of challenges could

include “commitment to resolve issues of combinations, trust that is informed to everyone, and persuasion capability” (Bove, et. al., 2022).

### ***On How Cultural Differences Impact the IPOs’ Daily Activities***

The cultural differences among individual police officers (IPOs) also had impact on their daily activities.

*Table 9. On How Cultural Differences Impact the IPOs’ Daily Activities*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Negative work impact	10	43.48%
Tolerance and adjustments	7	30.43%
Careful in words and deeds	4	17.39%
No impact	3	8.70%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

### ***Negative Work Impact***

From the answers, the main impact was the negative work impact arising from these differences, with majority of ten providing this answer. The reasons or sources of negative work impact were slowing down of production due to cultural prohibitions, beliefs and considerations (Participants 6, 11 and 15), the way one greets and wear dresses (Participant 8); and work life balance, time management, and decision-making processes (Participant 12).

### ***Tolerance and Adjustments***

The second impact of cultural differences on IPO’s daily activities was tolerance and patience, with a frequency of seven. Unlike working in the Philippines where one has at least many ideas fellow Filipinos, working with other cultures require much patience and modifications of styles. These include always being mindful of other cultures (Participant 2), lots of understanding (Participant 9), tolerating smell (Participant 10), not being affected by lots of criticisms (Participant 13), and being patient (Participant 14).

### ***Being Careful in Words and Deeds***

The third impact of cultural differences on IPO’s daily activities was on always being careful in words and deeds. These included being mindful in acting and avoiding disrespect (Participant 2) and being mindful of the words being said (Participant 19, 20, and 22).

These are the observations of the author. “In my workplace, a visitor colleague placed his foot on the table while using his laptop which for him maybe customary but for me the behavior is inappropriate, disrespectful and boastful.”

“I observe that Bosnian, Nigerian are straightforward as compared with my Indonesian colleague in my office.”

In the daily lives of the Filipino IPOs, the cultural challenges have impacts on the works, in tolerance and adjustments in speaking and in actions. Filipinos must endure the daily differences. They have also need to adjust on some offensive nature of speech of other contingents.

On these challenges, Wale’s (2024) discussion of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory identified the challenges on uncertainty avoidance which is veering towards high or low tolerance on uncertainty. Filipinos have high level of tolerance and are attuned to adjusts to challenges. These traits are needed to mitigate the daily impact to daily activities of these cultural challenges.

### ***On How Cultural Differences Affect Performance of IPOs in UNMISS***

The direct question was: “How do cultural differences affect your performance as a police officer in UNMISS? The following were the themes that precipitated from the codes.

Table 9. On How Cultural Differences Affect Performance of IPOs in UNMISS

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Misunderstanding affecting work negatively	12	52.17%
Adjustment	8	34.78%
No impact	3	13.04%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Misunderstanding affecting work negatively**

More than half (12) of the participants conveyed the idea of misunderstanding affecting work negatively. These negative impacts were manifested in the differences in time management, punctuality, and deadlines (Participant 2), effort to understand others' customs and traditions (Participants 3, 6, 12, 15, 18, 19 and 21), unhealthy relationships (Participant 5), stress and diminished morale (Participant 12), and discomfort in movement (Participant 14).

**Adjusting for Common Understanding**

The other theme was adjusting for common understanding. To adjust, IPOs needed to be ready and briefed properly on the mission (Participants 4, 7, and 10), adjusting to communication difficulties (Participants 9 and 22), and extending patience (Participant 20).

These are the author's observations. "A conflict over the approach to handling a dispute in my workplace highlighted the challenge of balancing diplomatic and being straightforward in communication styles."

"Diplomatic approach helped resolve a tense situation in my office during the discussion on tasks given by the senior management."

"A cultural clash over decision-making processes with colleagues led to delays and required additional mediation to reach a consensus."

The main objective of the IPOs is to maintain peace in South Sudan. Instead of fully focusing on these issues, the IPOs still have to take into account the cultural differences affecting their works. These results were aligned to the findings of Visagie, et. al. (2022). They looked at the psychological demands and impact of peacekeeping. Negative experiences in deployment of the soldiers were found out in the study.

**Changes in Communication Style to Work Better with Different Nationalities**

As communication barriers and issues were identified as major issues, the participants were asked: "How do you change your communication style to work better with colleagues from different nationalities?"

Table 10. Changes in Communication Style to Work Better with Different Nationalities

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Talking clearly	12	52.17%
Adjusting to the communication style of the other person	11	47.83%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Talking clearly**

The main theme that emerged was on talking clearly, with 12 participants providing with this answer. Talking clearly was specified as keeping short and simple talk (Participants 7 and 9), use of easily understood words (Participant 8), smiling (Participant 14), being mindful of the cultural differences (Participants 15, 20, and 21), clarifying what the other was

saying and meaning (Participant 16), slow and calm manner (Participant 19).

**Adjusting to Others' Communication Style**

Another theme that emerged was adjusting to others' communication style, with a frequency of 11. These included the use of the English language (Participant 1), understanding or adopting the level of communication of the



other IPOs (Participants 3 and 6), use of sign language (Participant 4), being natural and truthful (Participant 11), and being aware of the language differences (Participants 12 and 13). Participant 18 had a comprehensive explanation on adjustment: “By consciously adjusting my communication style to accommodate the cultural preferences of my colleagues from different nationalities, I enhance teamwork, collaboration, and overall effectiveness in UNMISS. Embracing cultural diversity not only fosters mutual respect and understanding but also contributes to a more cohesive and productive peacekeeping environment. For instance, during the planning session for patrol, I noticed that colleagues from a European country preferred a structured, agenda-driven meeting format, while colleagues from an Asian country valued more open-ended discussions. To adapt, I facilitated the meeting with an agenda that allowed for both structured discussion points and opportunities for free-flowing dialogue. I ensured to clarify key points directly and succinctly while also encouraging contributions from all participants, respecting their cultural preferences for communication.”

These are the author’s observation. “I observed a colleague speak more slowly and clearly and sometimes write and draw or used visual aids when communicating with other

colleagues from non-English speaking backgrounds.”

“I easily adjusted myself in the communication style to be more direct and clearer when working with colleagues from Nigeria, Egypt, and Portugal.”

“Adapting with the more straightforward approach of colleagues from Northern European countries.”

Filipinos adapt to the situations. When their counterparts speak slow, they can speak slowly. The research showed that being clear in the language not only creates better understanding, but it also reduces the chances of conflicts. These themes led to overcoming the difficulties as experienced by Filipino IPOs in South Sudan. These findings are consistent to O'Donoghue's (2024) claim that cross-cultural communication creates enhanced work culture.

**Support and Resources to Help Overcome Cultural Challenges in Workplace**

The question then, based on the previous impacts, was how to overcome these challenges. Specifically, the participants were asked: “What support or resources would help you overcome cultural challenges in your role in the workplace?”

Table 11. Support and Resources to Help Overcome Cultural Challenges in Workplace

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Building up knowledge and orientation on other cultures	22	95.65%
None	1	4.35%
Total	23	100%

**Building up knowledge and orientation on other cultures**

To overcome these cultural challenges, the major theme was on building up knowledge and orientation on other cultures. This can be done through training and seminars before departure, as answered by 13 of the 22 participants. More specifically, the trainings and seminars must include the other countries’ cultures, customs, etiquettes, language, religion. A comprehensive was provided by Participant 15: Overcoming cultural challenges in the workplace, especially in a diverse environment

like UNMISS, requires support and access to resources that promote cultural understanding, communication, and collaboration. Here are some key support and resources that can help individuals address cultural challenges in their role at UNMISS:

1. Cross-cultural training: Providing cross-cultural training programs can help individuals develop cultural competence, sensitivity, and awareness.
2. Language training: Offering language training courses in the local languages spoken in

the mission area can help individuals improve their language skills and better communicate with colleagues and community members.

3. Cultural mentors or advisors: Having access to cultural mentors or advisors who can provide guidance, insights, and support on navigating cultural challenges can be valuable.
4. Interpreters and translation services: Access to interpreters and translation services can facilitate communication between individuals who speak different languages.
5. Cultural sensitivity resources: Providing resources such as cultural guides, reference materials, and online resources on cultural norms, customs, and practices of different cultures can help individuals deepen their cross-cultural understanding and navigate cultural differences effectively.
6. Conflict resolution training: Offering training in conflict resolution techniques that are sensitive to cultural differences can help individuals address and resolve conflicts that may arise due to cultural misunderstandings.
7. Diverse work teams: Promoting diversity in work teams can create opportunities for individuals to learn from each other's cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.
8. Feedback mechanisms: Establishing feedback mechanisms where individuals can provide feedback on cultural challenges they face and suggest ways to improve cultural competence in the workplace can help organizations address cultural issues proactively and continuously improve cultural awareness and sensitivity.

These are the author's observations. There is a "need for more comprehensive cross-cultural training and resources to better understand the diverse cultures in the mission area."

"Cross-cultural training and language learning resources should be made available to Filipino peacekeepers to overcome cultural challenges and improve performance."

"A lack of sufficient cultural orientation and language resources initially left Filipino IPOs

struggling to effectively engage with colleagues from non-English speaking backgrounds."

Preparing Filipino contingents in UN missions requires comprehensive pre-deployment training. Learning the culture and language of the host country, including those of the other contingents, is a must. As Holohan (2019) recommended, trainings must integrate into the soft skills of communication or gender and culture-sensitive behaviors that breed teamwork.

## Conclusions

This study highlights how Filipino Individual Peacekeeping Officers (IPOs) in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) navigate cross-cultural challenges. Despite significant cultural differences, common values such as mutual respect, politeness, and camaraderie played a unifying role among the different UN contingents. Filipino IPOs demonstrated adaptability, especially in adjusting to varied communication styles, religious customs, and work-related norms.

Language barriers emerged as the most pressing challenge, particularly in interpreting meaning and communicating in ways that avoid offense. These barriers impacted workflow and office procedures but also strengthened the IPOs' cross-cultural competence, increasing their tolerance, flexibility, and awareness of communication nuances. Filipino IPOs learned to speak more clearly, modify their communication styles, and exercise patience and sensitivity toward cultural differences.

These experiences underscore the importance of comprehensive pre-deployment training to prepare peacekeepers for linguistic and cultural complexities in international missions. Training should emphasize intercultural communication, values orientation, and conflict-avoidance strategies.

This research contributes to the limited body of knowledge on Filipino IPOs and their lived experiences in peacekeeping missions. Future research may explore focused topics such as intercultural communication barriers, the impact of cultural diversity on teamwork and leadership, strategies for fostering cohesion among multinational contingents, and ways to enhance the image and effectiveness of Filipino peacekeepers in global missions.

## Recommendations

One of the main recommendations is for the PNP to provide comprehensive training and orientation seminar to those who are qualifying for slots in UN missions. These can include the lessons on customs, religions, food being eaten by other cultures, communications styles, do's and don'ts and taboos.

Psychological assessment must be made on the areas of tolerance level, stress capacity, and cultural adaptation, and not just rely on the standard neuro-psych evaluation in the PNP Health Service.

Those who had gone to missions must also made to testify to the new candidates on their experiences, how to befriend new cultures, and how to overcome the challenges shown in this paper and other challenges written in the literatures.

The Filipino IPO contingents must make efforts to explain our Filipino culture. Some of the observations showed perceptions on Filipinos based only on trivial evidence or anecdotes. The Filipino IPO represents the whole Philippine culture. Each Filipino IPO must learn that their job is not only peacekeeping, but also to promote the real Filipino culture.

For future researchers, specific topics related to navigating cross-cultural challenges may be studied on the following: communication challenges, overcoming differing values, tolerating practices of other contingents, and improving the image of Filipino contingents in UN Missions.

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