

Experiences of Overseas Filipino Language Teachers Teaching Filipino Subjects to Filipino Non-Native Speakers in the Eastern Region, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

A study examining the experiences of twelve Filipino language teachers in Saudi Arabia found that English dominance in media, education, and social environments negatively impacted students' language skills. The study suggested that Filipino language learning should begin at home, with parents introducing simple vocabulary to their children from an early age. To support bilingual development, schools should enhance digital infrastructure, align teaching tools with students' needs, and develop updated curriculum plans. Instilling a love for the Filipino language and identity is essential for improving language proficiency among students living abroad.

Keywords: Teaching Filipino Subject Nowadays, Why Filipino students find Filipino subjects difficult, The Importance of teaching Filipino subjects

INTRODUCTION

The researcher has been teaching Filipino subjects since 2012. Over the years, she has observed noticeable differences in how the subject is taught and how students learn it. Teaching Filipino subjects in the current generation is a challenging task. The majority of children are not proficient in speaking Filipino. Whether it's one's own children, their classmates at school, or other children in public places like grocery stores, there is a growing trend of Filipino children speaking more English and less of their native language (Co, 2023).

Nowadays, students struggle significantly when writing paragraphs in Filipino. Lessons—especially those involving grammar—have become more complex, making the subject increasingly difficult for students. This difficulty is especially evident at the preparatory and elementary levels. In the past, students could speak fluently and understand the language well. In contrast, today's students lag far behind those from ten years ago in terms of Filipino communication skills. While they may have a basic understanding of the language, they struggle to express themselves both orally and in writing.

As students struggle with the subject, teachers also face challenges in helping them comprehend it. Teaching the entire subject in Filipino has become very difficult. A decade ago, subjects were taught entirely in Filipino; teachers rarely translated anything, except for difficult vocabulary, as most students were native speakers. Today, however, teachers often need to translate almost everything—especially during storytelling—so students can understand. Most overseas Filipino language teachers rely heavily on translation to aid student learning. As a result, there is little difference between teaching English and Filipino, and the essence of the Filipino language is being lost.

The researcher investigated the experiences of Filipino language teachers in addressing these current trends, in which many Filipino children now speak English more fluently than their national language, making it difficult for them to comprehend and learn Filipino subjects in school.

Philosophical Underpinnings

Martin Heidegger's Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology is a self-improvised epistemology that

combines phenomenology and hermeneutics. It was developed in his work *Being and Time*, and focuses on the lived human experience. Heidegger's approach emphasizes the concept of "Dasein," meaning "Being-in-the-world," and the importance of understanding the existence and destiny of individuals within an alien world. This qualitative study used Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology to examine the lived experiences of overseas Filipino language teachers teaching Filipino subjects to Filipino non-native speakers in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia. The study aimed to provide meaningful context for others by analyzing and interpreting stories that convey the ordinary experiences of individuals involved in the phenomenon of interest. The researcher's understanding of the hermeneutic framework is crucial for authentic interpretation, as it addresses how and why individuals attach meaning to experiences and offers a deeper explanation of symbolic interactionism.

METHODOLOGY

This study was anchored in the post-positivist research paradigm, which emphasizes the exploration of shared experiences and the pursuit of conclusions that reflect broader communal truths (Wildemuth, 1993; Fischer, 1998; Phillips & Burbules, 2000). Specifically, the study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative approach, aiming to understand how Filipino language teachers perceive and interpret their experiences teaching Filipino as a subject to students who are non-native speakers of the language. These students, primarily born and raised in Saudi Arabia, are culturally immersed in a non-Filipino environment and often speak English as their first language.

Table 1 and 2 presents the demographic profile of participants in the study, including their age, gender, academic attainment, and length of teaching experience. The data was collected through online in-depth interviews conducted via Zoom. The research focused on twelve Filipino language teachers from Al Majd International School in Dammam and the International Philippine School in Al-Khobar, both located in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia. Participants were deliberately selected using purposive sampling to ensure they possessed relevant teaching experience and could provide rich, context-specific insights. The small and focused sample size allowed for the collection of deep, nuanced data, consistent with qualitative research principles.

Table 1 Basic Information About the Interviewees (Al Majd International School in Dammam)

Teacher Participants	Age	Gender	Educational Attainment	Length of Teaching Experience
P1	36	Male	Master's Degree	6 years
P2	42	Female	Master's Degree	12 years
P3	40	Male	Master's Degree	26 years
P4	45	Male	PhD Ongoing	24 years
P5	37	Male	Master's Degree	9 years
P6	55	Female	PhD Ongoing	15 years
P7	45	Female	College Graduate	16 years
P8	52	Female	PhD Ongoing	9 years

Table 2 Basic Information About the Interviewee's (International Philippine School in Al-Khobar)

Teacher Participants	Age	Gender	Educational Attainment	Length of Teaching Experience
P9	30	Female	Master's Degree	7 years
P10	39	Male	Master's Degree	20 years
P11	40	Male	Master's Degree	20 years
P12	42	Male	Master's Degree	22 years

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method. These interviews were conducted both in person and via Zoom, using open-ended questions that allowed for probing and reflection. The flexible yet structured format enabled the researcher to explore participants' teaching strategies, challenges, and perceptions in depth. The interview guide was aligned with the study's objectives and ensured consistency while accommodating spontaneous dialogue. All interviews were conducted in settings that preserved participant comfort and confidentiality.

Guided by Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology, the study viewed the researcher as the key instrument of data collection and interpretation. The researcher, a Filipino language teacher with twelve years of professional experience, utilized her lived experiences and sensory perception to understand the phenomenon more intimately. This approach was supported by Martin Heidegger's Hermeneutic Circle, where understanding evolves through a cyclical process of interpreting parts of the data in relation to the whole and vice versa. The researcher engaged in multiple readings of the interview transcripts, constantly refining her interpretations in light of new insights and critically evaluating her assumptions throughout the analysis.

With participants' informed consent, video recordings of interviews were made to capture both verbal and non-verbal cues, enhancing the richness and accuracy of the data. These recordings were transcribed in a quiet and secure environment, using headphones to maintain confidentiality. Identifiable information was anonymized through coded names, and all personal data was stored securely and scheduled for destruction after one year.

The data analysis process involved the identification of initial and final codes, followed by the emergence of themes that captured the essence of the participants' lived experiences. This iterative analysis allowed the researcher to integrate both subjective interpretations and shared meanings, aligned with phenomenological philosophy. The integration of literature review, field experiences, and participant narratives contributed to a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Participants were fully informed about the research's nature, purpose, and limitations. They participated voluntarily, with full rights to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. The research was confined to two institutions and did not involve any public sharing of data beyond academic dissemination. Any secondary sources, such as web-based information, were properly acknowledged.

The primary aim of the study was to present the interpreted lived experiences of Filipino language teachers in international settings where the Filipino language is no longer the students' mother tongue. By documenting and analyzing these experiences, the study provides insights into the techniques, strategies, and challenges of teaching Filipino in a multicultural and multilingual context. These findings offer practical implications for future Filipino language teachers abroad and contribute to the broader discourse on language education in globalized environments.

RESULTS

Summary of P1's Lived Experiences

Teacher's Amazement. P1 expressed surprise upon realizing that the students could not understand Filipino, saying, *"When I was speaking Filipino... the students didn't understand me!"* He had expected them to be fluent because they were in a Philippine school, but was amazed to find that they are English speakers.

Challenging Tasks. P1 described teaching Filipino to Filipino non-native speakers as difficult, stating, *"It's a little bit hard because I'm reading it in Filipino and then translating it into English."* He shared that only a few students understood Filipino, while most struggled, even with basic words like *"bahay"* (house). He explained, *"Even the stories—sentence by sentence—I translate them so that during the Q&A, they can answer."* P1 highlighted the language barrier, noting, *"Our children have difficulty speaking Filipino... they can't express themselves."* Although initially amazed by how *"Englisero"* (English speakers) the students were, he later realized that translation was necessary for comprehension.

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P1 emphasized the value of visual aids when teaching Grade 1 students, saying, *"Since I teach Grade 1... It's more visual, Ma'am."* He noted that students often understand vocabulary better through images, sharing, *"Even without translation, when they see it, the child says, 'Ah! That's the house!'"* To support learning, he uses pictures, realia, flashcards, and Google searches, especially when books lack illustrations. He stressed, *"You need realia... that's how the kids are,"* highlighting those visual tools are essential for helping young learners comprehend Filipino lessons.

Language Teachers' Insights. P1 explained that many parents in foreign countries prioritize teaching English to their children, stating, *"Since they are in a foreign country, their purpose is to be understood by all... That's why English is the first language they taught their children."* He noted that in multicultural environments, parents view English as more useful than Filipino. He also observed that students rarely speak Filipino at school, saying, *"At our school, the students also speak English,"* which limits their exposure and practice with the Filipino language.

Summary of P2's Lived Experiences

Challenging Tasks. P2 described teaching Filipino subjects abroad as challenging due to students' limited understanding of the language. She noted, *"In the Philippines, when you teach Filipino, you teach purely Filipino. But here... the children speak English."* Because even basic Filipino words are unfamiliar to them, teachers must translate lessons: *"To help them understand better, you will now translate it into English."* This often leads to disengagement, as *"they don't answer anymore and they all become quiet, which means they don't understand it."* P2 stressed the importance of unlocking basic vocabulary and being well-prepared, saying, *"There are vocabulary words that they need to know"* and *"When it's Filipino time... you should be somewhat prepared."*

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P2 emphasized the importance of using various teaching tools to support student understanding, stating, *"You need visual and auditory aids, as well as YouTube videos, for them to comprehend."* She highlighted that beyond translation, instructional materials and creative strategies are essential for helping Filipino students abroad learn effectively. These approaches make lessons more engaging and improve students' academic performance, requiring teachers to be both resourceful and creative.

Language Teachers' Insights. P2 explained that children in Saudi Arabia mostly use English at home and school, saying, *"The children communicate with their parents primarily in English... their medium of speech is English."* She also observed that they prefer English-language media: *"They even prefer viewing English-language shows and videos, Ma'am."* P2 added that the digital environment shapes their language habits, noting, *"They are in the digital era, Ma'am,"* which further reinforces their preference for English over Filipino.

Summary of P3's Lived Experiences

Challenging Tasks. P3 shared that teaching Filipino in Saudi Arabia is much harder than in the Philippines, saying, *"It's difficult... comparing it to my experiences in public schools in the Philippines. Here in Saudi Arabia, even simple words are difficult for them to understand."* He explained that students often read Filipino texts without comprehension, and when asked about them, *"none... nothing"* is understood. Because English is their first language, students are more comfortable expressing themselves in English, which limits their practice and understanding of Filipino.

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P3 shared that he uses technology like YouTube to aid learning, stating, *"I use YouTube, for example, Filipino phrases with English translations."* He believes updated teaching tools are essential for Filipino students who primarily speak English, emphasizing that such resources help this generation understand and succeed in a language they are less exposed to daily.

Language Teachers' Insights. P3 observed that many Filipino children in Saudi Arabia primarily use English, saying, *"These children... are left at home and most of them are watching YouTube videos—all in English."* He noted that despite his efforts, students struggle with retention because they don't use Filipino daily: *"Honestly, the reason there is no retention of learning is because they're not using it every day."* P3 added

that even at home and in social settings, English dominates: *“When they mingle with their friends... the language they use is English,”* making it difficult for them to practice and retain Filipino.

Summary of P4’s Lived Experiences

Challenging and fulfilling. P4, after 24 years of teaching Filipino, shared that it's his first time teaching Filipino to students who speak English as their first language, saying, *“This is my first experience teaching Filipino to Filipino students, yet they are more into English-speaking.”* He finds the experience both *“challenging, yet exciting and fulfilling.”* To address students' difficulties, especially in Filipino literature, he emphasized the need for thorough preparation and vocabulary-building: *“More preparations are needed, more activities are needed, exercises for Filipino vocabulary—it is a must.”* He also noted the importance of reteaching foundational skills before tackling high school-level content: *“You need to teach it again before introducing the target topics.”*

Instructional Tools and Techniques. To support English-speaking students at Al Majd International School, P4 shared that he uses various tools, saying, *“I used translation techniques and also visuals and photos for remembering, and watching videos related to some topics.”* He emphasized the need for creativity and innovation in teaching, as traditional methods may not be effective. Using visually appealing resources helps capture students’ interest and improve their understanding of Filipino lessons.

Language Teachers’ Insights. Filipino parents in Saudi Arabia generally favor English as their children’s first language, with one observation noting, *“Parents, especially here in Saudi Arabia, prefer that their child must be fluent in English.”* The dominance of English is further reinforced by digital exposure: *“Maybe the second is the influence of social media platforms... the movies... and even online games.”* These factors, combined with their environment, lead many children to feel more at ease using English, as *“most of the young generation today feels more comfortable expressing their thoughts in English rather than in Filipino.”*

Summary of P5’s Lived Experiences

Challenging Tasks. P5 shared that teaching Filipino to Filipino non-native speakers, especially in upper elementary, is very challenging. She explained, *“It seems like Filipino is a foreign language to them, even though they are Filipinos.”* These students lack foundational knowledge and have become dependent on translation, which becomes harder to sustain as they advance. P5 noted that they struggle in all language areas—*“You ask them to read a story, but they still can't understand it... They have even more difficulty writing essays. When speaking, their tongues get twisted.”* She attributed these difficulties to the dominance of English in their environment, stating, *“They have gotten used to using the English language. That’s why there is a language barrier when teaching Filipino.”* Although they are Filipino by heritage, their limited use of the language affects their comprehension and appreciation of the subject.

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P5 encourages autonomous language learning by allowing students to use a dictionary during reading activities, explaining, *“When they have something to read and they come across a word they don't understand, I allow them to use their dictionary, Ma'am.”* He believes this method promotes better retention, adding, *“It’s better for me if they look up the words themselves because retention is better that way.”*

Language Teachers’ Insights. P5 highlighted that children's early exposure to English-language media has a greater influence on their language development than parental guidance. He shared, *“The children, even at a young age, watch English movies and shows. That’s where they get ideas about words, and they start using them.”* He added that limited communication with parents contributes to this, saying, *“Their parents don’t talk to them much, and most of what they hear are English words from YouTube and TV.”* This constant exposure leads children to absorb and retain English more easily than Filipino.

Summary of P6’s Lived Experiences

Challenging Tasks. P6 observed that most children born in Saudi Arabia are English-speaking, stating,

“Especially the children born here in Saudi Arabia, most of them are English-speaking.” She explained that Filipino children in the eastern region have limited exposure to their native language, making Filipino unfamiliar to them. As a result, *“they also have a hard time speaking Filipino, and they don't understand it much either.”* This language barrier leads to learning difficulties, prompting the need for bilingual teaching strategies.

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P6 shared that she uses “code-switching” and direct translation to help her kindergarten students understand Filipino lessons, as *“they have a hard time speaking and understanding Filipino.”* To support comprehension, she incorporates visual aids, saying, *“With the pictures of the topics, I explain to them what the content in the book is... Then, if I have flashcards, I show them the flashcards and translate those too.”* These strategies help make lessons more engaging and accessible for young English-speaking Filipino learners.

Language Teachers’ Insights. P6 attributed Filipino children’s struggles with the language to influences from *“parents, peers, the environment, and social media.”* She shared her personal experience, saying, *“I am also a parent... English is the language being spoken.”* She noted that children often rely on translation for Filipino lessons because *“small children nowadays are more into the things they watch on YouTube”* and continue to speak English with classmates. This frequent use of English limits their appreciation and practice of Filipino.

Summary of P7’s Lived Experiences

Challenging Tasks. P7 described Filipino children raised in Saudi Arabia as primarily *“English speakers, even if they are children of our fellow Filipinos.”* Since English is their first language, these children struggle to communicate and understand Filipino, leading to a major challenge for teachers. She stated, *“Those are just my challenges—the language barrier.”* This language barrier makes Filipino classes difficult for the students.

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P7 uses various teaching tools, saying, *“I have a PowerPoint. I’m using realia, and then on YouTube, sometimes on Google, when I don't have any pictures.”* To aid understanding, she employs direct translation or code-switching, explaining, *“I read in Filipino, then I’ll translate it into English so they can understand it better.”* This approach helps students link Filipino lessons with their primary language, English.

Language Teachers’ Insights. P7 explained that students primarily speak English at home because *“their mother and father communicate to them in English.”* She added that *“when it comes to school, they are also English-speaking.”* P7 identified peers and online content as major influences, saying, *“Other factors are their playmates and what they watch.”* These environmental factors contribute to English being their main language of communication, reducing the need to learn Filipino.

Summary of P8’s Lived Experiences

Challenging Tasks. P8 described Filipino non-native speakers in Saudi Arabia as *“smart... and at the same time, they are English-speaking,”* but noted they *“find it very hard to speak Filipino.”* She explained that students often ask for clarification on basic words, such as *“What does bumbero (fireman) mean?”*, making translation and explanation necessary. P8 emphasized the challenge of constantly switching languages, saying, *“I will repeat that until they understand it completely.”* She highlighted that teaching Filipino is especially difficult in private schools where English dominates, stressing the importance of the *“medium of instruction”* in effective learning.

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P8 employs various teaching strategies to engage her students, saying, *“I always have a PowerPoint whenever I present... to make it easier to teach, we need to show them pictures.”* She emphasizes the need for a stable internet connection to access online resources, explaining, *“When you show them a picture through YouTube or Google, they understand it better... we must have a strong internet connection.”* To enhance comprehension, P8 uses *“code-switching, the alternation of Filipino and English,”* along with direct translation and explanation.

Language Teachers’ Insights. P8 identified several factors contributing to Filipino students’ difficulty in

speaking Filipino in Saudi Arabia. She explained, *"Maybe one reason... is that they lack friends who speak Filipino, unlike in the Philippines, where Filipino is the primary language."* She also pointed to exposure to English-language videos and parents speaking English at home, stating, *"Then their mommy and daddy also talk to them in English... Their foundation in school is also in English."* These environmental and social influences limit students' opportunities to communicate in Filipino.

Summary of P9's Lived Experiences

Challenging and fulfilling. P9 described teaching Filipino to English-speaking elementary students in Saudi Arabia as *"challenging but fulfilling."* She improves comprehension by translating lessons, saying, *"It's unavoidable, I translate it into English so that the kids can understand it better."* P9 noted that students *"lack vocabulary and understanding of the Filipino language"* and struggle with *"pronunciation and intonation."* This difficulty in speaking and writing Filipino often leads to *"a lack of interest in the subject because they don't understand the Filipino language,"* making teaching more challenging.

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P9 uses technology and media to help students understand stories, stating, *"I show them videos. Through the media and the pictures, they understand the story."* She encourages reading at home with parental support: *"I ask them to read the stories at home... their parents are there to help them understand."* To engage students, she employs *"interactive games, role-playing, and group activities."* When Filipino explanations are difficult, P9 uses *"code-switching or the alternation of languages"* by translating lessons into English to improve comprehension.

Language Teachers' Insights. P9 identified several reasons why Filipino children in Saudi Arabia struggle to communicate in Filipino. She explained, *"Maybe the rise of the English language... and then the influence of media and technology as well."* She added that many children lack appreciation for Filipino, noting, *"Children are really into social media, so the language used is English... and the lack of training, the practice for children in speaking the Filipino language."* P9 also pointed to dialect differences, saying, *"I have a student whose mother tongue is Bisaya, then the next language is English,"* which further shifts their focus away from learning Filipino.

Summary of P10's Lived Experiences

Challenging Tasks. P10 shared those Filipino classes are very difficult for students, leading some to cry during exams: *"When there's an exam, those students cry because they are struggling. They can't understand even simple Filipino."* He noted that students lack reading comprehension and often ask for recitation questions to be repeated or translated: *"They ask the question to be repeated or translated into English."* P10 emphasized the importance of preventing fear of the subject, saying, *"Once the child fears the subject, they will lose interest in learning Filipino even more."* He added that students struggle to connect with Filipino literature because *"they haven't experienced growing up in the Philippines and they haven't experienced hardship."*

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P10 allows the use of digital translators in class but cautions students, *"I always remind them that not everything translated by Google Translate is accurate or... correct."* He supports pre-reading and at-home learning, explaining, *"I have them read the lesson in advance... I allow them to answer [exercises] at home and ask for help from their parents."* This helps ease the learning process by building vocabulary ahead of time. He also emphasized the necessity of bilingual teaching abroad: *"We can't avoid using bilingual with our Filipino subject here in international schools overseas."*

Language Teachers' Insights. P10 explained that many Filipino students born and raised in Saudi Arabia have adopted English as their mother tongue due to several factors. He stated, *"The root of why English became the mother tongue is because we are in another country. Secondly, the parents practice speaking English, so the students have poor comprehension of Filipino."* He added that dialectal diversity contributes to this shift: *"Some of them speak pure Tagalog... others use Bisaya or Hiligaynon or Kapampangan or English."* Exposure to English-language media and social platforms further reinforces this, as *"most of the shows the kids are watching are in English... the Filipino language is being set aside."*

Summary of P11's Lived Experiences

Challenging Tasks. P11 recognized the generational challenges in learning Filipino, saying, *"Some of them are Gen Z... and now there's Gen Alpha, so we can't blame them for having difficulty speaking Filipino."* He found teaching Filipino to English-speaking Filipino students challenging and addressed it by using bilingual instruction: *"I made a double effort and became bilingual. I explained in Filipino and then also in English."* This strategy helps bridge the gap in comprehension.

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P11 emphasized the need for creativity when teaching students who view Filipino as a foreign language. He shared, *"I just adjust my strategies; I also adjust my exams so that they can easily understand them and to ensure fairness because some understand."* By modifying his teaching methods and assessments and incorporating technology, he aims to support students with varying levels of Filipino comprehension.

Language Teachers' Insights. P11 identified four main reasons why children in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia speak English as their first language. First, *"they were born here. Those kids almost grew up here."* Second, children are exposed to gadgets and social media because *"gadgets become a tool for parents to keep their children quiet while they are doing something. That's Peppa Pig's fault... It's also Dorex's fault."* Third, English dominates their environment: *"The first language that will be used to communicate here in Saudi Arabia is English."* Lastly, P11 pointed to a common misconception among some parents: *"Some parents believe that their child is already intelligent if they are proficient in English. That is the most wrong mindset in life, hehehe."*

Summary of P12's Lived Experiences

Challenging Tasks. P12 shared that a major challenge in teaching Filipino in Saudi Arabia is the textbook itself, which is *"designed for Filipinos who grew up in the Philippines and naturally learned deep words."* He explained that students struggle even with average-level vocabulary: *"Even with words of average difficulty, they ask me about them."* Another issue is comprehension and application, particularly in grammar: *"Even if we say that theoretically, they understand the rules... when it comes to application... their sentence construction is not perfect."* P12 also pointed out that *"they grew up speaking English, and the students don't even speak Filipino,"* which is compounded by their exposure to various Philippine dialects.

Instructional Tools and Techniques. P12 shared that being a MAPEH major benefits his Filipino teaching because *"we have a lot of activities and games,"* allowing him to creatively engage students: *"We dedicate time to converting our role as a MAPEH teacher into that of a Filipino teacher."* However, he noted that lessons slow down due to the need for translation: *"The lesson slowed down because I'm a translator... Most of the sentences I said in Filipino, I had to repeat in English."*

Language Teachers' Insights. P12 noted that Gen Z and Gen Alpha students were raised in English-dominated environments due to media influence: *"Gen Z or Gen Alpha grew up with social media, gadgets, YouTube, games, and vloggers who use English as their language. In other words, they have grown up with mostly English."* He added that students in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia have limited interaction with Filipino speakers: *"The people they interact with are limited... the people they talk to. And mostly, they know the same things."* This isolation reinforces English as their primary language.

DISCUSSION

The consolidated matrix reveals a consistent pattern of challenges, strategies, and insights among teachers handling Filipino language instruction for non-native Filipino students in Saudi Arabia. The findings are organized under three major themes: **Challenging Tasks**, **Instructional Tools and Techniques**, and **Language Teachers' Insights**.

Common Threads

This research study centers on the lived experiences of Filipino language teachers instructing Filipino subjects

to Filipino non-native speakers in two Philippine schools in the Eastern Region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The five recurring themes—Challenging Tasks, Instructional Tools and Techniques, Language Teachers’ Insights, Challenging and Fulfilling, and Teachers’ Amazement—reveal how Filipino teachers consistently encounter linguistic and cultural barriers. These arise because many of their students were born or raised abroad and have limited exposure to the Filipino language. English is the dominant language in both their homes and learning environments, causing students to view Filipino as unnecessary or even foreign (Reyes, 2021; Calma, 2021; Garbanzoz & Ba-ad, 2023).

Teachers report that students often struggle with basic Filipino vocabulary, comprehension, and sentence construction, which severely limits their participation in Filipino classes (McConville, 2019; Meneses, 2023). Consequently, teachers are compelled to use bilingual strategies—frequent **code-switching, translations, and visual aids**—to aid comprehension (Gomilla, 2022; Perfecto, 2022; Jogulu, 2024). These efforts demonstrate not only pedagogical flexibility but also a strong commitment to maintaining linguistic and cultural identity.

Modern tools, including **technology, multimedia, social media platforms, and real-life objects (realia)**, are widely employed to improve engagement and address the linguistic gap (Saavedra et al., 2022; Raval & Majmudar, 2020; Zludwig, 2023). Through these methods, teachers tailor their instruction to suit their learners’ backgrounds and capabilities.

In terms of insight, educators emphasize that students’ low motivation stems from **early English exposure, globalization, and parental preference for English**, which is often seen as a marker of intelligence and social status (Crosier, 2019; Co, 2023; Santos, 2020; Melchor et al., 2023). As a result, many students grow up without appreciating the value of learning Filipino, further complicating teachers’ efforts to foster language acquisition (Trotta et al., 2022; Jubahib & Bayani, 2024).

Despite these challenges, several teachers describe the experience as **both difficult and fulfilling**. While they face resistance and slow progress, moments when students begin to understand and speak Filipino bring a deep sense of accomplishment (Boligol et al., 2023). This duality—the **burden of resistance and the joy of connection**—captures the heart of their teaching journey.

Ultimately, the common thread in this study illustrates that teaching Filipino in a foreign context involves more than just transferring linguistic knowledge. It is a **cultural advocacy**, a continuous negotiation between linguistic reality and national identity, and a testament to the teachers’ perseverance and passion for preserving the Filipino language abroad.

Core Themes

This study explores the lived experiences of Filipino language teachers instructing Filipino non-native speakers in two Philippine schools located in the Eastern Region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These learners are children of overseas Filipino workers, who are typically raised in English-dominant environments where Filipino is not used as a primary means of communication at home, in school, or daily life. As a result, teachers face unique pedagogical and socio-linguistic challenges in delivering Filipino language instruction. Through in-depth interviews with twelve teachers, several recurring themes emerged that provide insight into the complexities of teaching Filipino in this context.

Challenging Tasks. Teachers consistently reported that students find Filipino language learning to be highly difficult. Struggles with vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, reading comprehension, and self-expression are widespread among learners. These difficulties are compounded by a lack of exposure to Filipino in their homes and communities, leading to anxiety, frustration, and emotional distress in some students. The absence of foundational language skills hinders both classroom engagement and language acquisition.

Instructional Tools and Techniques. In response to these challenges, teachers have developed creative and adaptive instructional strategies. These include code-switching between Filipino and English, using PowerPoint presentations, realia, multimedia resources like YouTube videos, storytelling, games, role-playing, and visual aids. Teachers also assign home reading activities and provide simplified bilingual explanations. These methods reflect the educators’ dedication to making Filipino instruction more accessible, engaging, and

aligned with the linguistic realities of their learners.

Language Teacher's Insights. Teachers offer nuanced perspectives on the broader socio-linguistic environment that affects students' relationships with Filipino. English predominates not only in the academic setting but also at home and in digital media, rendering the Filipino unfamiliar and often undervalued. Furthermore, some students speak regional dialects such as Bisaya, adding another layer of complexity. Teachers observe that students frequently associate English with intelligence and success, while Filipino is perceived as secondary or non-essential—an attitude that significantly impacts motivation and learning outcomes.

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