

# Social Studies Teachers' Experiences in Teaching Through the Filipino Language

Gwendolyn Y. Bolos<sup>1</sup>, Grace G. Tizon<sup>1</sup>, Rochelan A. Lumasag<sup>1</sup>, Perlito D. Jomoad<sup>2</sup>, Cynthia S. Superable<sup>2</sup>

Misamis University, Oroquieta City, Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

Language plays a crucial role in shaping teaching and learning experiences, particularly in multilingual classroom contexts. This study investigates the lived experiences of junior high school Social Studies teachers who teach through the Filipino language, drawing on Moustakas' lifeworld existentials as its analytical lens. Data were gathered from seven social studies teachers through a semi-structured interview guide. Six emerging themes were identified, namely: experiencing embodied ease and strain in teaching social studies through Filipino, experiencing emotional connection, confidence, and challenge in Filipino-medium teaching, experiencing a dynamic and adaptive classroom atmosphere when teaching social studies in Filipino, experiencing ongoing growth and adaptation in Filipino-medium teaching over time, strengthening relational connections through Filipino-medium teaching and navigating instructional and linguistic tensions in teaching social studies through Filipino. Teaching Social Studies through Filipino promotes teacher confidence, adaptive and engaging classrooms, professional growth, strong relational connections, and the ongoing management of linguistic and instructional challenges to ensure effective learning. School administrators and curriculum developers may support Social Studies teachers by providing ongoing professional development, mentoring, and accessible Filipino-language resources to enhance instructional strategies, classroom adaptability, and the balance between language clarity and academic rigor.

**Keywords:** Filipino-medium instruction, instructional adaptation, linguistic, social studies teaching, teacher-student relationships

## INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of national development and individual advancement, serving as a primary mechanism for transmitting knowledge, competencies, and values across generations (Alainati & Al-Hunaiyyan, 2024; Zahra, 2022; Zhao et al., 2024). Central to this process is the language of instruction, which significantly influences learners' comprehension, engagement, and academic performance (Tsang & Dang, 2023; Zen & Ariani, 2022). In multilingual societies, debates persist regarding the most appropriate medium of instruction, particularly in contexts where tensions arise between promoting indigenous or national languages and prioritizing global languages such as English (Mubina, 2025).

Proponents of mother-tongue and national language instruction argue that learning improves when students engage with content through familiar linguistic and cultural frameworks, thereby strengthening comprehension and identity formation. In contrast, advocates of English-medium instruction emphasize its role in fostering global competitiveness, expanding access to academic resources, and enhancing socioeconomic mobility. These divergent perspectives underscore the complexity of bilingual and multilingual education policies, particularly in postcolonial settings such as the Philippines.

In the Philippine educational system, Filipino has been designated as a primary medium of instruction in several subject areas, including Social Studies, to promote national identity and facilitate conceptual understanding (Java, 2025; Tamana & Pagaddut, 2024). However, the effectiveness of this policy largely depends on teachers' pedagogical competence, linguistic proficiency, and capacity to navigate classroom realities (Melegrito, 2022).

Teaching Social Studies in Filipino presents both opportunities and constraints. While it may foster deeper civic consciousness and contextualized understanding of historical and political concepts, it also requires teachers to translate abstract ideas into accessible Filipino terminology, often amid limited instructional materials and varying levels of student language proficiency (Protacio, 2022; Sigalla & Kimario, 2025).

Sociocultural and constructivist perspectives further explain the role of language in learning. Grounded in sociocultural theory, learning occurs through language-mediated social interaction within meaningful cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). Language is not merely a vehicle for communication but a central tool in shaping thought and conceptual development. In multilingual classrooms, the chosen language of instruction directly influences how learners internalize knowledge and participate in meaning-making processes. Complementing this perspective, constructivist theory posits that learners actively construct understanding based on prior knowledge and lived experiences (Piaget, 1970). In this regard, using Filipino as a medium of instruction may enhance learning by situating Social Studies content within students' linguistic and sociocultural realities. However, when students have uneven proficiency in Filipino due to regional dialects or the dominant use of English, the instructional process becomes more complex, requiring teachers to employ adaptive, flexible pedagogical strategies.

Despite extensive research comparing Filipino and English as media of instruction, much of the existing literature has focused primarily on student achievement outcomes. For example, Ablao et al. (2024) found that Filipino as a medium of instruction enhanced student performance in Social Studies. While such findings contribute valuable insights into academic outcomes, they provide a limited understanding of the lived experiences of teachers who implement language policies in everyday classroom practice. Teachers, as frontline agents of policy enactment, directly navigate linguistic diversity, resource constraints, and instructional adjustments; yet their perspectives remain underexamined.

This gap highlights the need to explore how Social Studies teachers experience and respond to the challenges of teaching in Filipino within bilingual contexts. Rather than concentrating solely on performance metrics, this study centers on teachers' lived experiences as critical actors in shaping meaningful educational practice.

The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges Social Studies teachers encounter when using Filipino as a medium of instruction and to examine the strategies they employ to address them. Specifically, the study investigates how teachers manage differences in students' language proficiency, compensate for limited instructional resources, and adapt pedagogical approaches to sustain engagement and learning outcomes. By situating the analysis within sociocultural and constructivist frameworks, the study seeks to interpret teachers' experiences beyond descriptive accounts and contribute to broader theoretical and policy discussions on bilingual education.

This research aims to contribute to teacher education, school leadership, and educational policy in the Philippines. Insights from teachers' experiences may inform the refinement of bilingual education policies to better reflect classroom realities. Furthermore, the study may guide professional development initiatives and resource allocation strategies that support teachers in effectively implementing Filipino-medium instruction in Social Studies.

Ultimately, this research aims to advance a nuanced understanding of Filipino-medium instruction by foregrounding teachers' experiences. By illuminating both the opportunities and constraints of implementing language policy in multilingual classrooms, the study seeks to promote pedagogical improvement and support the development of culturally responsive and linguistically inclusive education in the Philippine context.

## **METHODS**

This study employed an existential-phenomenological research design, grounded in Clark Moustakas's (1994) framework, to explore the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers who use Filipino as the medium of instruction. Existential phenomenology was deemed appropriate because the study sought to understand how teachers constructed meaning from their instructional experiences within specific linguistic and institutional contexts. Rather than measuring outcomes, the design prioritized participants' subjective interpretations,

personal engagement, and professional decision-making as they navigated linguistic, pedagogical, and emotional challenges in their classrooms.

The study was conducted in a higher education institution in Misamis Occidental that also offers junior high school education. The site was selected purposively because it implements Filipino as a medium of instruction in Social Studies and serves students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. This context provided a relevant setting for examining the complexities of bilingual classroom instruction. Seven Social Studies teachers participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) currently teaching Social Studies, (2) using Filipino as a primary medium of instruction, and (3) having at least one year of teaching experience in the institution. The final number of participants was determined through data saturation, meaning that interviews continued until no new significant themes or insights emerged. Saturation was observed after the seventh interview, indicating sufficient depth and redundancy in the data.

Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit detailed accounts of teachers' instructional challenges, coping strategies, classroom adjustments, and perceptions of student engagement and learning. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow flexibility in probing emerging themes while maintaining alignment with the study's research objectives. Interviews were conducted individually and recorded with participants' consent to ensure accuracy in transcription.

Ethical protocols were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants were provided with informed consent forms outlining the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and secure storage of interview data. The study complied with institutional research guidelines and relevant data privacy standards.

Data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological procedures, including epoche, horizontalization, thematic clustering, and textural-structural synthesis. Through epoche, the researcher bracketed personal assumptions to minimize bias. Significant statements were identified during horizontalization and grouped into thematic clusters representing shared experiences. Textural descriptions captured participants' experiences, while structural descriptions examined how contextual and institutional factors shaped those experiences. The final synthesis integrated these dimensions to provide a comprehensive understanding of teachers' lived realities in implementing Filipino-medium instruction.

This study is limited to Social Studies teachers from a single higher education institution in Misamis Occidental; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other regions or educational settings. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by personal reflection and subjective interpretation. Despite these limitations, the research offers in-depth insights into classroom-level enactment of language policy within a specific bilingual context.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study identified six interrelated themes that illuminate the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers implementing Filipino as a medium of instruction: (1) embodied ease and strain in Filipino-medium teaching, (2) emotional connection, confidence, and affective challenge, (3) dynamic and adaptive classroom interaction, (4) ongoing professional growth and instructional recalibration, (5) strengthened relational engagement through shared language, and (6) negotiation of instructional and linguistic tensions. Collectively, these themes reveal Filipino-medium instruction as a mediated, relational, and developmental pedagogical practice shaped by linguistic negotiation and contextual responsiveness.

### Theme 1: Experiencing Embodied Ease and Strain in Teaching Social Studies Through Filipino

Teachers' experiences of teaching Social Studies through Filipino revealed a constant interplay between embodied ease and physical-cognitive strain. Using Filipino-enabled natural speech flow, emotional comfort, and culturally grounded interaction allows teachers to communicate ideas more fluidly and expressively in the classroom (Dagalea, 2022; Robiños & Alcazaren, 2024; Ching et al., 2025). The national language functioned as a familiar communicative tool that supported verbal fluency, emotional connection, and meaningful

engagement with learners, reinforcing Filipino's role in facilitating socially mediated learning and classroom rapport (Igarashi, 2024; Lobo, 2024).

However, this ease was counterbalanced by embodied strain arising from prolonged speaking, frequent translation, and the cognitive effort required to clarify specialized concepts. Teachers reported vocal fatigue, mental exhaustion, and physical discomfort associated with sustained code-switching and instructional intensity (Ferrer, 2025; Dagalea, 2022). To manage these demands, they relied on embodied strategies such as gestures, facial expressions, and physical demonstrations, highlighting how bodily expressiveness became an essential pedagogical resource. These findings align with sociocultural perspectives that emphasize scaffolding through multimodal communication, in which teachers balance linguistic accessibility with instructional clarity while sustaining their own well-being (Vygotsky, as cited in Daramola et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2024).

## **Theme 2: Experiencing Emotional Connection, Confidence, and Challenge in Filipino-Medium Teaching**

Teaching Social Studies in Filipino fostered strong emotional connection, confidence, and authenticity among teachers, reinforcing the affective dimension of instructional practice. The use of the national language enabled teachers to discuss social issues in relatable ways, strengthen teacher–student relationships, and express ideas with greater emotional resonance (Song, 2025; Bulusan, 2025). These positive emotional experiences enhanced teachers' sense of efficacy and professional identity, consistent with research showing that emotional engagement supports instructional motivation, creativity, and sustained commitment (Richards, 2020; Xu et al., 2024).

At the same time, emotional strain emerged from repeated translation, pacing disruptions, and students' difficulty with academic Filipino. Teachers' emotions fluctuated in response to student comprehension and participation, reflecting the dynamic nature of emotional labor in teaching (Frenzel, 2014; Xu et al., 2024). Moments of confusion or hesitation increased stress, while active participation and understanding restored motivation and energy. Viewed through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, these emotional shifts underscore how language mediates both cognition and emotion in classroom interactions, requiring teachers to regulate affect while scaffolding learning through code-switching, contextualization, and culturally responsive examples (Husnaini et al., 2024; Thorne, 2024; Manera et al., 2025).

## **Theme 3: Experiencing a Dynamic and Adaptive Classroom Atmosphere When Teaching Social Studies in Filipino**

Filipino-medium instruction fostered a dynamic, interactive, and adaptive classroom atmosphere characterized by openness, participation, and relatability. Teachers observed that students were more willing to share ideas, engage in discussions, and express opinions when lessons were delivered in a familiar language, creating a positive and collaborative learning environment (Robiños & Alcazaren, 2024; Ching et al., 2025; Ferrer, 2025). The use of Filipino reduced emotional and linguistic barriers, enabling spontaneous interaction and strengthening classroom rapport, consistent with studies on culturally responsive and multilingual pedagogy in Philippine classrooms (Velasco, 2024; Garrido & Niez, 2025).

Despite these benefits, the classroom atmosphere required continuous adaptation due to varied student language proficiency and unfamiliar academic terminology. Teachers responded by employing translanguaging practices, code-switching, and collective translation to scaffold understanding and sustain engagement (Hanasan & Cabanatan, 2024; Manera et al., 2025). These adaptive strategies reflect sociocultural principles where learning is mediated through flexible language use within students' Zones of Proximal Development (Panhwar et al., 2025; Rahman, 2024). While such responsiveness demands instructional agility and sustained effort, it ultimately strengthens teachers' adaptive expertise and supports inclusive, learner-centered Social Studies classrooms (Dagalea, 2022; Igarashi, 2024).

## **Theme 4: Experiencing Ongoing Growth and Adaptation in Filipino-Medium Teaching Over Time**

Teachers' experiences reflect continuous professional growth and adaptation in Filipino-medium Social Studies instruction, shaped by sustained practice, reflection, and responsiveness to learners' evolving linguistic realities.

Over time, teachers developed greater fluency, confidence, and instructional agility, enabling them to scaffold complex concepts more effectively through simplified vocabulary, contextual explanations, and gradual introduction of academic terms. These findings align with studies in multilingual Philippine classrooms showing that teachers refine pedagogical strategies iteratively as they reconcile curriculum demands with students' language proficiencies (Garrido & Niez, 2025; Velasco, 2024; Hanasan & Cabanatan, 2024). Professional development activities, such as workshops and collaborative learning, further supported this growth by equipping teachers with adaptive strategies that enhanced lesson flow, pacing, and learner comprehension.

This ongoing adaptation is also influenced by changing student language practices, including increased exposure to English through media and technology, which necessitates continuous instructional recalibration. Teachers responded by employing translanguaging, simplified explanations, and vocabulary scaffolding to maintain accessibility while preserving conceptual rigor. Anchored in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, this growth can be understood as a socially mediated process in which teachers expand their instructional competence through interaction, reflection, and contextual adjustment within their Zone of Proximal Development (Rahman, 2024; Thorne, 2024). Overall, Filipino-medium teaching emerges as a dynamic, developmental practice in which sustained experience and reflective engagement enable teachers to deliver more fluent, meaningful, and responsive Social Studies instruction over time.

### **Theme 5: Strengthening Relational Connections Through Filipino-Medium Teaching**

Using Filipino as the medium of instruction strengthened relationships between teachers and students by fostering shared linguistic and cultural understanding, thereby enhancing trust, comfort, and classroom participation. Teachers observed that students were more expressive, confident, and engaged when lessons were delivered in Filipino, as language accessibility reduced communication barriers and encouraged active dialogue. Consistent with research on multilingual and translanguaging classrooms, flexible language use—allowing Filipino alongside English or local languages—supported deeper meaning-making and inclusive participation, reinforcing teacher–student rapport (Combong, 2025; Diaz, 2025; Miranda & Gervacio, 2023). Filipino-medium instruction thus functioned not only as a cognitive tool but also as a relational bridge that validated students' identities and promoted a sense of belonging.

Relational strength was further enhanced by teachers' linguistic flexibility and sensitivity to students' comfort levels, with a priority on comprehension over rigid language enforcement. By allowing students to express ideas in familiar languages and collaboratively translating concepts, teachers sustained engagement while nurturing mutual respect and trust. Grounded in Social Constructivism, these practices reflect how shared dialogue and culturally relevant communication enable collaborative knowledge construction and emotional connection (Vygotsky, 1978; Daniels, 2023). However, relational challenges persisted in multilingual contexts with uneven Filipino proficiency, underscoring the need for responsive scaffolding. Overall, Filipino-medium teaching fostered a participatory, inclusive, and emotionally supportive classroom climate where relationships became central to meaningful Social Studies learning.

### **Theme 6: Navigating Instructional and Linguistic Tensions in Teaching Social Studies Through Filipino**

Teachers' experiences highlight persistent instructional and linguistic tensions as they balance Filipino language policy mandates with students' diverse linguistic competencies and the demands of disciplinary accuracy. While Filipino facilitated comprehension, engagement, and cultural relevance, challenges emerged when translating technical Social Studies terms, using limited instructional materials, and addressing students' stronger proficiency in English. These tensions reflect broader findings in Philippine education research showing that teachers often negotiate among policy expectations, material constraints, and classroom realities, adapting prescribed practices to ensure accessibility and learning effectiveness (Velasco, 2025; Combong, 2025). The mismatch between English-medium professional training and Filipino-medium classroom instruction further intensified these challenges, requiring teachers to strategically mediate between the two languages.

To manage these tensions, teachers employed flexible strategies such as structured code-switching, translanguaging, contextualized explanations, and technology to support accurate translation. From a sociocultural perspective, these adaptations demonstrate how teachers actively mediate learning through

language as a cultural tool, aligning instruction with students' needs within socially situated contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). Rather than viewing linguistic tension as a barrier, teachers framed it as an opportunity for professional growth, enhancing instructional creativity and adaptability. Ultimately, navigating these tensions underscores the importance of sustained institutional support, linguistically responsive resources, and professional development to help teachers maintain both conceptual rigor and inclusivity in Filipino-medium Social Studies instruction.

From a sociocultural standpoint, these negotiations illustrate active mediation within institutional and cultural constraints. Teachers did not passively implement policy; they interpreted and adapted it. Filipinomedium instruction thus emerges as a negotiated practice shaped by agency, reflection, and contextual responsiveness.

Across all six themes, Filipino operates as a mediational cultural tool shaping cognition, emotion, identity, and professional growth. Consistent with Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, learning unfolds through socially situated language practices, with teachers scaffolding understanding within dynamic linguistic environments. At the same time, constructivist ideas show that building knowledge is connected to relationships and experiences, needing a match between academic concepts and students' cultural-linguistic realities.

The findings extend these frameworks by demonstrating that mediation is embodied, affective, and institutionally situated. Teachers experience linguistic negotiation not as a purely cognitive task but as a lived process involving emotional regulation, physical exertion, and relational engagement. Filipino-medium instruction, therefore, represents a developmental practice shaped by continuous recalibration rather than fixed policy implementation.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers who implemented Filipino as a medium of instruction in a bilingual context. Findings indicate that Filipino-medium teaching strengthens teacher–student relationships, enhances participation, and supports professional confidence by grounding instruction in culturally familiar language. Consistent with sociocultural and constructivist perspectives, language functioned as a mediating tool for co-constructing meaning and connecting new knowledge to learners' prior experiences.

At the same time, teachers navigated linguistic diversity, uneven proficiency, limited resources, and the tension between accessibility and academic precision. The effectiveness of Filipino-medium instruction, therefore, depends not only on policy mandates but on teacher adaptability and institutional support. By foregrounding teachers as active agents of policy enactment, the study contributes to broader bilingual education debates by highlighting how language policy is negotiated in classroom practice rather than merely prescribed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher education institutions and school administrators are encouraged to provide sustained, theory-informed professional development that strengthens teachers' competence in academic Filipino, scaffolding strategies, and linguistically responsive pedagogy. Adequate instructional materials and contextualized terminology guides should be developed to support conceptual rigor while maintaining accessibility. Policymakers are encouraged to adopt a context-sensitive approach to language implementation that incorporates teacher feedback and recognizes multilingual classroom realities.

Future research should examine long-term instructional and student learning outcomes of Filipinomedium education across diverse contexts using mixed-method or longitudinal designs to broaden the applicability and impact of these findings.

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