

Teaching across Specialization: Experiences of Out-of-Field Non-Filipino Major Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study is qualitative phenomenological research that aims to describe and understand the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and perspectives of non-Filipino teachers assigned to teach Filipino in public secondary schools in the Municipality of Santo Tomas, Davao del Norte. Purposive sampling was used to select fourteen (14) participants, of whom seven underwent in-depth interviews and seven participated in focus group discussions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Based on the analysis of the narratives, major challenges in teaching Filipino by non-Filipino teachers emerged, including lack of proper grammar, limited vocabulary, difficulty in pronunciation, difficulty in explaining concepts, lack of confidence in using the language, pedagogical incompatibility, and changes in classroom dynamics. In response to these challenges, various coping mechanisms were developed such as intensive preparation and research, language translation, collaborative learning, creative use of technology, use of online learning resources, and maintaining a positive outlook. Furthermore, the study demonstrated the growth of professional and cultural awareness among the participants, including the appreciation of continuous learning, the need for systemic reform in teacher assignment, and the importance of Filipino language training. The findings are a significant contribution to the promotion of inclusive and quality education, which is in line with the objective of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

Keywords: Challenges in language teaching, coping mechanism, lived experiences, non-Filipino teachers, qualitative phenomenology, teaching Filipino

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary education in the Philippines is hindered by the perennial problem of unqualified teachers working in all schools. Meanwhile, the teaching of Filipino subject should be emphasized to show the field of heritage language or Heritage Language (HL). Also, teachers should impart knowledge to students that is applied in real-life scenarios. However, in the current education system, there have been a series of issues that directly affect teachers. One of them is the innovative study by Flang and Magindra (2025) who examined the Experiences of non-major teachers in Filipino in Piling Larang–Akademik, who conducted a survey and interviews with non-major teachers in Filipino who teach Filipino in Senior High. It was discovered there that many non-major teachers had difficulty using Filipino in class, especially in technical or grammatical aspects, and there were problems in using the Filipino language, including the lack of knowledge in technical Filipino terminology. This shows that the lack of vocabulary and correct grammar is not just a subjective feeling but a real obstacle to teaching.

In addition, Verano's (2024) analysis of the Level of Competence of Teachers in Filipino in the 2013 Filipino Orthography showed the general competence of teachers (major and non-major) when it comes to orthography and grammatical aspects of Filipino, from spelling, correct use of punctuation, syllables and syllables, to changing sounds.

This is supported by a qualitative study by Bugwak (2021) where "out-of-field teachers" (not majoring in the subject being taught) identified "difficulty in adjusting to the academic content of the subject" and "difficulty in addressing students' queries" as the main theme. In many situations, teachers have difficulty understanding the

lesson well before explaining it, or they may not be able to immediately give a clear answer when there is a question from the student. Because of this, they expect to spend extra time preparing, reading, or researching before the concept can be taught.

It was also supported by Lumanta and Liquido (2025) studying teaching practices and challenges in secondary schooling; it was shown that the diversity of learners and their deficiency in Filipino vocabulary continues to be one of the main obstacles in effective learning and teaching. The variation of the vocabulary level of students brings complications to the development of significant discussion and daily communications in Filipino, so the vocabulary is important for understanding and making sense.

In addition, in the study by Flang and Magindra (2025), it was discovered that out-of-field Filipino teachers struggle especially with pedagogical content knowledge: their skills in style, methodology and use of the Filipino language are not enough to fully deliver the lesson. Because of this, many of them need additional training and support to develop their ability to teach Filipino in a way that is appropriate to the language and context.

The findings of this study can be understood through the lens of Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978), which states that learning is a social process that develops through interaction, collaboration, and the use of language as an important tool in the construction of knowledge. From this perspective, learning is not just an individual activity but a collective process shaped by interaction with others and participation in a learning community. In the context of the study, the experiences of non-Filipino major teachers showed that their development as teachers takes place through collaborative processes within the school. They often consult with Filipino major teachers, exchange ideas with fellow teachers, and seek guidance from coordinators to deepen their understanding of grammar, concepts, and teaching strategies. Moreover, the use of online references, multimedia materials, and other digital platforms served as forms of scaffolding that aided in their preparation and expansion of language and pedagogic knowledge. The use of translanguaging or the strategic use of Filipino, English, and Visayan to more clearly explain concepts to students also appeared in the study. In Vygotsky's view, language is not only a medium of communication but an important tool in shaping thinking and learning.

In the broader context of global education aspirations, it is important to link this study to the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically those that address the quality, inclusiveness, and effectiveness of the education system. Studying the experiences, challenges, and perspectives of teachers who teach the Filipino subject even if it is not their field is directly related to the target of SDG #4 to improve the quality of teaching, increase the number of qualified teachers, and effective student learning.

METHOD

Research Participants

The informants and participants of this study are secondary and out-of-field teachers who teach Filipino subjects from public schools in the Municipality of Santo Tomas who have been assigned to teach Filipino subjects in their respective schools for one to four years now. For the in-depth interview, I chose seven out-of-the-field teachers who teach the Filipino subject and another seven for the Focus Group Discussion as I follow Creswell's (2013) suggestion that the study group should consist of three to fifteen members.

This study was conducted in the Municipality of Santo Tomas, Davao del Norte, a multilingual environment where the daily communication of most residents use Cebuano or Visayan as a primary language. Although Filipino is the official pedagogical language for Filipino acidification at school, Cebuano remains dominant lingua franca in the community, as well as the interaction of teachers and students in and out of the classroom. Due to this linguistic condition, it is common for teachers and students to use Cebuano as a bridge or bridge language to facilitate the explanation of concepts, especially when there is difficulty using pure Filipino. Visayan use as supporting language becomes a practical strategy to maintain students' understanding while gradually introducing Filipino terminology. Therefore, such a linguistic landscape plays an important role in shaping strategies and coping mechanisms of non-Filipino major teachers in their Filipino teaching.

Research Instruments

The main instrument of this study is semi-structured interview conducted through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to get the deeper experience, perspective, and strategies of teachers who teach Filipino even though it's not their specialization. According to Van Manen (2017), this type of interview allows the participants to freely express their experience while guided by open questions. Aside from the interview, data gatherings have also included reading of documents and visiting schools as additional sources of contextual information. Reading of documents include examining related documents such as teaching guides, lesson plans, and other materials used by Filipino teaching teachers. Meanwhile, visiting schools were conducted to understand the actual teaching context, including the assignment situation, teacher distribution, and the school's linguistic environment. Information obtained from school documents and observations were not used as the main data for the development of themes, but served as contextual support to further understand and deepen the interpretation of the narratives of participants in the process of thematic analysis.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological method to explore the lived experiences of out-of-the-field teachers who teach the Filipino subject. Qualitative research according to Creswell (2009) as mentioned by Diaz (2015) is an expression of exploration and understanding of individuals or groups placed in a social or human problem. It is qualitatively phenomenological because it is a combination of methods, such as conducting interviews with informants, reading documents, observation and visiting schools, to understand the lived experiences of non-mainstream Filipino teachers.

Results and Discussion

Experiences of Non-Filipino Major Teachers in Teaching Filipino Subjects

After a thorough analysis of the data from the interviews, various themes emerged that describe the experiences and challenges of non-Filipino major teachers in teaching Filipino. These themes are as follows: (1) Lack of proper use of Filipino grammar, (2) limited Filipino Vocabulary, (3) lack of Fluency in Filipino Pronunciation, (4) Difficulty in Explaining Concepts using Filipino, (5) Lack of Confidence in Using the Filipino Language, (6) Pedagogical Incompatibility, and (7) Change in Class Dynamics.

Table 1 shows a summary of the experiences of non-Filipino major teachers in teaching the Filipino subject based on their responses to the interview.

Table 1 Major Themes and Core Ideas regarding the Experiences of Non-Filipino Major Teachers in Teaching Filipino Subjects

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Lack of proper use of Filipino grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammatical and literary limitations (IDI 01) • Difficulty understanding grammar (IDI 04) • Lack of grammatical knowledge (IDI 05) • Feeling of lack of grammar (IDI 05) • Transfer to Visayas for teaching (IDI 07) • Dictionary reliance on grammar (FGD 03)
limited Filipino Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of deep vocabulary (IDI 01)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doubts about Filipino terminology (IDI 02) • Difficulty choosing the right word (IDI 02) • Did not memorize the term Filipino (IDI 04)
lack of Fluency in Filipino Pronunciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stuttering in the use of Filipino (IDI 03) • Pronunciation is not natural (IDI 07) • Pressure on correct pronunciation (FGD 06) • Doubt about correct pronunciation (FGD 01)
Difficulty in Explaining Concepts using Filipino	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled in literary criticism in English (IDI 01) • Lack of practical experience (IDI 02) • The concept explained is not clear (IDI 04) • Lack of contextual explanation (FGD 02) • Literary devices are difficult to explain (FGD 04) • Difficulty in correct translation in Filipino (FGD 07)
Lack of Confidence in Using the Filipino Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of confidence in Filipino (IDI 02) • Fear of not being able to answer the question (IDI 03) • Difficulty in preparing an interesting lesson (IDI 05) • Unable to explain in Filipino (IDI 07)
Pedagogical Incompatibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More familiar with English terminology (IDI 02) • Limited exposure to Filipino nuances (IDI 02) • Difficulty in transferring the pedagogical mindset (IDI 02) • Lack of term equivalence (IDI 04) • Not compatible with the main specialization (IDI 05) • English strategies are not appropriate (FGD 02) • Unfamiliarity with grammatical structure (FGD 02) • Assignment due to lack of teachers (IDI 07)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approach cannot be applied automatically (FGD 01) • Differentiation of language logic (FGD 03)
Change in Class Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management confidence in ability (IDI 01) • Students' surprise (IDI 02) • Confusion with the teacher's new subject (IDI 03) • Lack of expression in Tagalog (IDI 07) • Slow question response (FGD 03) • Being shy in speaking (FGD 05)

Coping Mechanism of Non-Filipino Major Teachers in Teaching Filipino Subjects

This section presents coping mechanisms or methods used by non-Filipino major teachers to overcome the challenges they experience in teaching the Filipino Subject. After a thorough analysis of the participants' responses, various strategies emerged that showed their creativity, resourcefulness, and willingness to learn despite their specialization deficits.

From the initial themes and core ideas obtained in the interview, the following themes were formed that reflect the different dimensions of their coping mechanisms: (1) Intensive Preparation and Research of Lesson Content; (2) Language Translation from another Language to Filipino; (3) Collaborative Learning and Collaborative Cultivation; (4) Creativity in Using Technology and Interactive Strategies; (5) Use of Online Learning Resources; and (6) Maintaining a Positive Outlook Despite Challenges.

Table 2 Main Themes and Important Ideas Coping Mechanisms of Non-Filipino Major Teachers in Teaching Filipino Subjects

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Intensive Preparation and Research of Lesson Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webinar attendance and research (IDI 01) • More extended preparation time (IDI 02) • Re-study of grammar and literature (IDI 03) • Consultation with Filipino major teachers (IDI 03) • Repeated study of the subject (IDI 04) • Finding different references (IDI 04) • Duplication of time and effort (IDI 05) • Expanding subject knowledge (IDI 06) • Use of easy-to-understand references (IDI 06) • Sharpening of critical thinking strategies (IDI 07) • Intensive reading before class (FGD 01)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watching video lessons online (FGD 02) • Developing a personal terminology list (FGD 05) • Asking for guidance in Filipino majors (FGD 06)
<p>Language Translation from another Language to Filipino</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting Filipino and English (IDI 01) • Using Visayas as a bridge (IDI 01) • Provisional use of English (IDI 02) • Intentional mixing of three languages (IDI 02) • Migration to Visayas in case of hardship (IDI 03) • Natural code-switching in class (IDI 04) • Situational use of three languages (IDI 05) • Visaya first before Filipino (IDI 05) • English terms with Filipino equivalents (IDI 06) • Visayas as a preliminary understanding (FGD 02) • Provisional English for clarity (FGD 03)
<p>Collaborative Learning and Collaborative Cultivation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support of co-teachers and principal (IDI 01) • Assistance of Filipino major teachers (IDI 03) • Asking for help from Filipino majors (IDI 04) • Guide from the Filipino Coordinator (IDI 04) • Consulting with fellow teachers (IDI 05) • Institutional support and training (IDI 05) • Principal's guidance on teaching (IDI 06) • Asking co-teachers for strategies (IDI 07)
<p>Creativity in Using Technology and Interactive Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using strategies derived from English teaching (IDI 01) • Use of roleplaying and multimedia presentation (IDI 01) • Creating innovative teaching methods (IDI 02) • Adapting English strategies to Filipino teaching (IDI 03) • Resourcefulness in solving teaching problems (IDI 05)

<p>Use of Online Learning Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of technology and interactive activities (IDI 05) • Preparation using Google and YouTube resources (IDI 07) • Integration of ICT and group activities in class (IDI 07) • Getting ideas and strategies from online platforms (IDI 07) • Implementation of the policy on the use of Tagalog in class (IDI 07) • Using multimedia for clearer concepts (FGD 03)
<p>Maintaining a Positive Outlook Despite Challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional readiness to face the challenge (IDI 01) • Constructive view of negative feedback (IDI 01) • Accepting the challenge as a learning process (IDI 03) • Challenge as a factor of pedagogical improvement (IDI 04) • Open disposition to constructive feedback (IDI 05) • Positive processing of criticism (IDI 07) • Changing anxiety into determination (FGD 02) • Supportive environment as motivation (FGD 07)

Insights and Reflections of Non-Filipino Major Teachers in Teaching Filipino Subjects

This section presents important insights generated from the experiences of non-Filipino major teachers in teaching the Filipino Subject. As they faced various difficulties in language, pedagogy, and emotions, they gradually developed a deeper understanding of the importance of their role and the broader context of teaching Filipino for Filipino youth.

From a thorough analysis of their responses, various perspectives and reflections emerged that described their growth as teachers, the development of their self-view, and the shaping of their professional and cultural awareness. The following themes represent their insights: (1) Recognition of the Importance of Effort and Continuous Learning; (2) Desire to Reform the Teacher Assignment System; (3) Understanding the Importance of Technical and Grammatical Skills in Filipino; (4) Necessary Professional Development Through Training and Seminars; (5) Appreciation of Filipino Culture and Subjects; and (6) Valuing Self-Development and Flexibility.

Table 3 Insights and Reflections Describing Their Growth as a Non-Filipino Major Teaching Filipino Subjects

Major Themes	Core Ideas
<p>Recognition of the Importance of Effort and Continuous Learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence in the ability to learn (IDI 01) • Dedication as an effectiveness factor (IDI 03)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open learning and accepting help (IDI 03) • Love and patience for the subject (IDI 04) • Thorough preparation and research (IDI 05) • Love for teaching as a guide (IDI 06) • Effort over natural talent (FGD 01) • Continuous learning as a professional mindset (FGD 03) • Learning as a lifelong process (FGD 06)
<p>Desire to Reform the Teacher Assignment System</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for screening and orientation (IDI 01) • Inappropriate assignment to non-major (IDI 02) • Lack of clear assignment guidelines (IDI 03) • Teacher qualification and quality of learning (IDI 04) • Deployment reform based on preparedness (IDI 04) • Assignment based on subject specialization (IDI 05) • Consultative assignment process (IDI 06) • Screening and consultation on teacher distribution (FGD 02) • Need for a clear policy (FGD 06)
<p>Understanding the Importance of Technical and Grammatical Skills in Filipino</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for technical knowledge of grammar (IDI 01) • Filipino as a technical subject (IDI 02) • Learning linguistic skills (IDI 03) • Appreciation of the wealth of the Filipino language (IDI 03) • Learning grammatical terminology (IDI 04) • Thorough study of the subject (IDI 06) • Effect of incorrect grammar on flow (IDI 07) • Scope of technicality in Filipino (FGD 01) • Mastery of grammar for clarity (FGD 04)
<p>Necessary Professional Development Through Training and Seminars</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer mentoring and collaborative learning (IDI 01) • Monitoring and pedagogical guidance system (IDI 01)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional support and subject-specific training (IDI 03) • Asking for guidance and collaboration (IDI 03) • Need for immediate intervention (IDI 04) • Adequate training for non-majors (IDI 05) • Research and collaborative professional learning (IDI 05) • Training and seminars for instructional competence (IDI 07) • Regular training for technical readiness (FGD 02) • Mentoring system as professional support (FGD 04)
<p>Appreciation of Filipino Culture and Subjects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language teaching as cultural transmission (IDI 01) • Spreading cultural and literary awareness (IDI 03) • Filipino as a factor of identity (IDI 04) • Passing on cultural traditions to youth (IDI 05) • Cultural context as a meaning of learning (FGD 03)
<p>Valuing Self-Development and Flexibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogical flexibility in teaching (IDI 03) • Hard work and openness to suggestion (IDI 04) • Expansion of knowledge and flexibility (IDI 07) • Actively seeking expert guidance (IDI 07) • Flexibility as a factor of effective learning (FGD 06)

Implication for Teaching Practice

The findings of the study show clear challenges and deficiencies experienced by non-Filipino major teachers in teaching the Filipino subject, including weakness in proper pronunciation and grammar, difficulty in explaining concepts using Filipino, emotional and professional doubts, and pedagogical incompatibility.

This has several important implications for teaching materials and educational systems. For the Department of Education, there should be specialized content training in grammar, proper pronunciation, phonology, and literary pedagogy. Develop a PCK-based training module (Pedagogical Content Knowledge) that will address the pedagogical mismatch experienced by non-major teachers.

At the level of the policy, the findings of this study have important implications for the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), particularly related to the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). Although the LET examines the general ability of teaching and knowledge of the subject, there is often a lack of relationship between specialization stated in the teacher's license and the actual duty in school. This study shows the need of better coordination between teacher license, specialization, and actual teaching duties. Policy enforcement may consider mechanisms better link the LET result and faculty's assignment policy to reduce teaching outbreak

outside specialization. Further, special bridging programs or certification modules may be implemented for teachers assigned to teaching assigned to those who are not among their main field of specialization.

For School Administrators, support teachers by providing adequate equipment such as updated teaching guides, visual aids, grammar references, and digital tools that can help explain linguistic concepts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study discusses the experiences, coping mechanisms, and important perspectives of non-Filipino major teachers who teach Filipino subjects in public schools. The study was limited to a selected number of participants, so it becomes an important basis for more extensive research. It is recommended to conduct a similar study with a wider scope and a larger number of participants from different regions to gather more comprehensive data about the widespread experience of non-major teachers in teaching Filipino. It is also good to conduct follow-up or re-interview with the same participants to determine if their experiences, perspectives, and coping mechanisms will remain over time.

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