

Original Article

## **Challenges of Pre-service Teachers in using the Filipino Language as a Medium of Instruction during Internship**

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### **Abstract**

Medium of instruction policies place practical demands on preservice teachers, particularly when classroom language requires sustained academic Filipino for explanation, classroom control, and assessment. This qualitative study examined how preservice teachers experienced teaching through Filipino during internship placements in public elementary and secondary schools. Ten preservice teachers participated through interviews and survey responses. Data underwent reflexive thematic analysis to surface shared patterns of challenge and adaptation. Results show five dominant themes. First, preservice teachers described gaps in Filipino instructional proficiency, which constrained explanation, vocabulary choice, and spontaneous elaboration in class. Second, they reported frequent code-switching to English as a compensatory move, yet they also perceived student confusion when switching became rapid or unplanned. Third, participants narrated reduced confidence and heightened anxiety, especially when they anticipated errors in Filipino grammar, pronunciation, or word choice in front of learners. Fourth, they described classroom management strain when directions, behavior reminders, and corrective feedback required precise Filipino that they did not consistently command. Fifth, they reported coping strategies that included advance preparation, review of Filipino lesson materials, use of examples and visual supports, and reliance on cooperating teachers and peers for language checks and feedback. These findings matter because they locate medium of instruction not only as a policy issue but as a competence demand within teacher preparation. In contexts where Filipino functions as the

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classroom language, internship support may require explicit training in Filipino academic register, structured guidance on strategic code-switching, and coaching that links clarity of instruction to classroom management and confidence.

*Keywords:* classroom discourse, code-switching, Filipino medium, preservice teachers, teacher confidence

## 1. Introduction

Language-in-education policy shapes what teachers must do in real time: explain concepts, scaffold understanding, question learners, and manage classroom interaction through a chosen classroom language. In multilingual systems, the medium of instruction often carries competing expectations. It can function as a tool for comprehension and inclusion, yet it can also operate as a gatekeeper that rewards those who already possess the dominant academic register. For preservice teachers, this tension becomes especially visible during internship, when they must perform instruction under observation while they still consolidate teacher identity, pedagogical skill, and communicative authority.

Global scholarship has long argued that early education through a familiar language can support comprehension, participation, and foundational literacy, particularly when instruction aligns with children's linguistic repertoires. In the Philippine case, debates around mother tongue-based multilingual education and later shifts in political priority illustrate how language policy can change rapidly and how classroom realities, stakeholder perceptions, and implementation capacity can reshape policy direction. Metila et al. (2025) traced how political prioritization for first language-based education weakened over time and contributed to policy reversal, underscoring how implementation constraints and public narratives can alter the perceived legitimacy of language reforms. At the same time, evidence from large-scale data has complicated claims that mother tongue-based approaches uniformly improve learning outcomes in linguistically diverse settings. Igarashi et al. (2024) showed that outcomes can differ when linguistic diversity, exposure, and system conditions vary, which highlights that language policy effects depend on classroom-level capacity and the fit between policy assumptions and school contexts.

Beyond policy, classroom language demands interact with teacher competence. Even when a language is nationally recognized or widely understood, teaching through that language requires more than conversational ability. Instruction requires academic register, precise vocabulary, coherent explanation, and responsive talk that adapts to learner misconceptions. For preservice teachers, these demands surface in high-stakes moments: when learners ask unexpected questions, when a concept requires rephrasing, or when behavior issues require firm but culturally and linguistically appropriate correction. If preservice teachers lack confidence or fluency in the

instructional register expected in the classroom, they may compensate through simplification, avoidance of elaboration, or reliance on another language, often English.

Code-switching becomes a central practice in such contexts. Teachers may switch languages to clarify meaning, emphasize key ideas, manage time, or respond to learner cues. Yet code-switching also carries risk when it lacks clear function, sequence, or boundaries, especially for learners who interpret switching as inconsistent expectations. Temesgen and Hailu (2022) documented how teachers use code-switching for pedagogical and interactional purposes, while also noting implications for learner comprehension and classroom language norms. In internship settings, preservice teachers may code-switch more frequently because they feel pressure to maintain instructional flow and avoid visible language errors. This can create a cycle where switching resolves an immediate barrier but also limits opportunities to build sustained confidence in Filipino instructional discourse.

Instructional language also intersects with clarity and classroom management. Clarity is not a stylistic preference; it shapes learner understanding, engagement, and the emotional climate of lessons. Meta-analytic work has shown robust associations between teacher clarity and student learning outcomes across contexts. Titsworth et al. (2015) synthesized evidence through two meta-analyses and reported meaningful links between clarity and student learning, which suggests that language proficiency constraints that reduce clarity can plausibly affect both cognitive and affective outcomes. In parallel, studies that link instructional clarity with classroom management indicate that clear explanations and well-structured directions align with more positive classroom processes and learner experiences. Chen and Lu (2022) examined relationships between classroom management, instructional clarity, and academic emotions in cross-national data, emphasizing how teaching features connect to learner emotion and appraisal systems. Although these studies often focus on general instructional quality rather than language policy, they point to a practical implication: when preservice teachers struggle to express clear directions or explanations in Filipino, classroom management and learner responsiveness may also suffer.

Teacher confidence and emotion further shape internship performance. When teachers anticipate linguistic errors, they may experience anxiety that affects voice projection, pacing, and willingness to invite open discussion. Over time, such affective strain can undermine instructional presence, especially in classrooms that require firm routines and consistent corrective feedback. Research mapping language teacher self-efficacy also highlights emotional factors as a major strand in the field, suggesting that perceived capability and emotional experience mutually influence teaching quality and persistence. Wang et al. (2024) synthesized language teacher self-efficacy research and described the prominence of emotional dimensions within that literature.

Within this landscape, preservice teachers who teach through Filipino occupy a complex position. They must comply with the expected medium, sustain clarity, and project authority, while still learning how to teach. The present study addressed this

gap by examining preservice teachers' reported challenges and coping strategies when Filipino served as the instructional language during internship placements. Specifically, it focused on how they described language proficiency constraints, code-switching decisions, confidence and anxiety, classroom management experiences, and the supports they used to sustain instruction.

## 2. Methodology

Employing a qualitative design, this study examined the experiences of pre-service teachers utilizing Filipino as a medium of instruction during their internship placements in public elementary and secondary schools. Ten pre-service teachers from Iligan Medical Center College were selected through purposive sampling to capture information-rich accounts relevant to the focus of the study. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews, eliciting descriptions of classroom language demands, instructional difficulties, learner reactions, and pedagogical supports. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, treating themes as patterns of shared meaning grounded in the dataset. Guided by Braun and Clarke's (2022) framework for coherence and rigor, the analysis involved iterative theme development to ensure the capture of both semantic content and underlying meaning. To ensure trustworthiness, the study maintained participant anonymity, preserved verbatim extracts, and used iterative checking of themes against the data to avoid overgeneralization.

## 3. Results

### Theme 1: Linguistic Limitations and Proficiency Gaps

Participants faced significant challenges in sustaining Filipino as the exclusive medium of instruction, particularly when spontaneous elaboration was required. Several respondents noted that lexical deficits, specifically the lack of precise vocabulary, hindered their ability to explain concepts fluently. One pre-service teacher noted, "*Teaching in Filipino is difficult because... sometimes I struggle to find the right words to explain concepts clearly.*" Consequently, participants often found that specific classroom terminology was more accessible in English, creating a barrier to fluid instruction in Filipino.

### Theme 2: Code-switching and Pedagogical Discontinuity

Code-switching emerged as a primary compensatory strategy to address language strain and maintain lesson momentum. However, participants observed that this linguistic pivoting often disrupted learner comprehension. As one participant noted, "*I end up switching... because some words are easier to express in English, but it can sometimes confuse the students.*" The potential for pedagogical discontinuity was highlighted by another respondent who observed that students appeared "lost"

when the language of instruction shifted abruptly, interrupting their cognitive processing.

### **Theme 3: Affective Challenges: Anxiety and Reduced Self-Efficacy**

The study identified a strong link between language proficiency and teacher self-efficacy. Participants expressed anxiety regarding potential errors in grammar or pronunciation, fearing that students would detect their deficiencies. One participant remarked, *“I worry that I might say something wrong in Filipino, and the students will notice.”* This fear of judgment contributed to feelings of insecurity and sadness, as participants perceived a gap between their actual proficiency and the professional standards required for instruction.

### **Theme 4: Language Barriers in Classroom Management**

Linguistic challenges extended beyond content delivery to classroom management. Participants reported difficulty issuing firm, behavioral directives in Filipino. One stated, *“It’s difficult to manage the class... it’s hard for me to explain in Filipino in a way that makes them listen.”* The inability to command authority through language resulted in the need for repetitive rephrasing, which diminished instructional time and increased teacher frustration.

### **Theme 5: Strategic Coping and Scaffolding**

To mitigate these challenges, participants employed various pedagogical and social coping mechanisms. Preparation was key; one participant noted, *“I’ve studied Filipino textbooks... so I can prepare the right words.”* Additionally, participants utilized non-linguistic scaffolds, such as visual aids and concrete examples, to bridge communication gaps when vocabulary failed. Social moderation also played a role, with participants relying on mentors and cooperating teachers to vet their lesson plans and validate their use of appropriate terminology prior to teaching.

## **4. Discussion**

The findings characterize Filipino medium instruction not merely as a policy compliance task, but as a rigorous demand for applied communicative competence. Participants’ reported struggles with vocabulary and spontaneous elaboration reveal a critical dissonance between conversational fluency and the academic register required for pedagogy. This distinction is pivotal; effective instruction necessitates precise labeling, logical sequencing, and responsive rephrasing - mechanisms that reduce ambiguity and scaffold learning. When teachers lack access to this specific register,

they may resort to compressing explanations or shifting to English, potentially compromising the cognitive depth of the lesson.

The prevalence of code-switching in this study reflects a pragmatic adaptation to linguistic strain. While Temesgen and Hailu (2022) argue that teacher code-switching often serves strategic instructional functions, the participants in this study largely described it as a compensatory mechanism for lexical deficits. This suggests a shift from intentional scaffolding to emergency repair. For teacher education, this implies that policy should move beyond a binary permission or prohibition of code-switching. Instead, training must focus on strategic bilingualism, teaching pre-service teachers how to signal language transitions and maintain normative consistency in the classroom.

Furthermore, the findings underscore that language proficiency operates through affective pathways. The reported anxiety and hyper-self-monitoring align with Wang et al.'s (2024) identification of emotional factors as central to teacher self-efficacy. In the high-stakes environment of an internship, this anxiety can diminish "teacher presence," leading to reduced voice projection and hesitant dialogue. This suggests that language proficiency challenges are not just linguistic but psychological barriers to professional identity formation.

These linguistic barriers notably bleed into classroom management. As Chen and Lu (2022) demonstrate, instructional clarity is intrinsically linked to student appraisal and emotional engagement. When pre-service teachers struggle to issue concise, authoritative directives in Filipino, the resulting ambiguity can erode classroom order. The study suggests that "clarity deficits" caused by language barriers may serve as a precursor to behavioral disruptions, as students disengage when expectations are linguistically opaque.

However, the participants' adaptive repertoires, specifically the use of visual scaffolds, scripted preparation, and mentor reliance, point to actionable interventions. The reliance on mentors for "culturally appropriate phrasing" suggests that social mediation is a critical component of language development during internships. Teacher education programs should therefore formalize these strategies, integrating "academic Filipino" into methods courses and providing modeled scripts for classroom routines.

Finally, these findings serve as a barometer for system readiness. As noted by Metila et al. (2025), the sustainability of language policy often hinges on implementation capacity. If pre-service teachers, the future workforce, struggle with the instructional medium, public confidence in the policy may erode. Aligning with Igarashi et al.'s (2024) conclusion that context determines the success of mother tongue-based education, this study argues that policy mandates must be matched with robust investments in teacher linguistic competence. The internship experience thus acts as an early warning system, highlighting that policy success depends not just on curriculum design, but on the teacher's capacity to deliver it fluently.

## 5. Conclusion

Preservice teachers reported that teaching through Filipino during internship required sustained academic language competence that many still developed. They described challenges in Filipino instructional proficiency, frequent code-switching with perceived learner confusion, reduced confidence and elevated anxiety, and classroom management strain tied to language clarity. They also reported adaptive strategies that centered on advance preparation, use of examples and visual supports, and reliance on mentors and peers. Teacher education programs can respond by strengthening Filipino academic register training, coaching strategic code-switching, and providing rehearsed classroom language routines that support clarity and management. Such supports may improve internship performance and strengthen classroom-level capacity for medium of instruction expectations.

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## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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