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Alternative Learning System Teachers' Competencies, Readiness, and Challenges in Teaching Filipino

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Abstract

Teaching Filipino in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) presents distinct challenges for teachers who often handle learning areas outside their field of specialization and with limited institutional support. While ALS has been widely studied in terms of access, implementation, and learner participation, fewer studies have examined the subject-specific needs of teachers handling Filipino. This study examined the competencies, readiness, and instructional challenges of ALS teachers in the Division of Science City of Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, Central Luzon, Philippines. Semi-structured interviews with nine ALS teachers were conducted and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that teachers encountered difficulties related to learners' low literacy, weak comprehension, limited motivation, and varied learning levels. Teachers also reported challenges in content mastery, particularly among those whose specialization was in a field other than Filipino, and difficulties associated with teaching multiple learning areas. Outdated training, limited instructional materials, and insufficient institutional support compound these difficulties. Despite these constraints, teachers employed instructional strategies such as translation, repeated explanation, differentiated tasks, and contextualized livelihood-related activities to support learners' understanding. The study recommends targeted professional development, updated Filipino instructional resources, and stronger institutional support to improve the delivery of Filipino instruction in ALS.

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Introduction

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a parallel learning system in the Philippines that provides a viable alternative to formal education for learners who are unable to access or complete basic education through the regular school system (Republic Act No. 9155, 2001; Republic Act No. 11510, 2020). Implemented through the Department of Education, ALS responds to the learning needs of out-of-school youth, adults, and other marginalized learners by offering flexible, non-formal, and informal learning pathways. Its institutional role has been strengthened through policy reforms, including Executive Order No. 356, s. 2004, which renamed the Bureau of Nonformal Education as the Bureau of Alternative Learning System, and Republic Act No. 11510, which institutionalized ALS in basic education (Executive Order No. 356, 2004; Republic Act No. 11510, 2020).

As a second-chance education program, ALS is socially significant because it provides learners with opportunities to develop literacy, complete basic education, pursue further studies, and improve employability. However, studies and program evaluations

have also shown that ALS continues to face persistent challenges related to learner participation, instructional quality, teacher preparation, resource availability, and program implementation (World Bank, 2018; Albert *et al.*, 2024). These concerns are particularly important because ALS teachers handle learners with diverse educational backgrounds, literacy levels, life circumstances, and linguistic experiences. Thus, effective ALS instruction requires flexible, contextualized, and learner-centered teaching approaches.

ALS instructional demands become more specific in the teaching of Filipino. Filipino is not only a learning area but also a medium for developing literacy, communication, cultural identity, and civic participation among ALS learners. Existing studies on Filipino language instruction have shown the value of alternative and learner-centered approaches, including language games, role-playing, continuous exposure to Filipino, and task-based learning, in improving learner engagement, confidence, and performance (Catanes, 2025; Hortizuela & Ciruela, 2025). However, much of this evidence comes from formal classroom settings and does not fully explain how Filipino is taught in ALS, where learners often have varied literacy abilities, irregular attendance, limited motivation, and different linguistic backgrounds.

Previous ALS studies have generally focused on program implementation, learner outcomes, teacher commitment, resource limitations, and institutional support (Albert *et al.*, 2024; Casingal, 2025; Francisco and Buri, 2024; Sumawang *et al.*, 2022). While these studies provide important insights into the broader conditions of ALS, less attention has been given to the subject-specific challenges of teaching Filipino. This gap is significant because teachers assigned to teach Filipino may not always have academic specialization or sufficient training in the field. In such cases, their instructional delivery may be affected by their content knowledge, pedagogical preparation, access to Filipino-specific materials, and exposure to relevant professional development. This concern is consistent with studies emphasizing that teacher content knowledge and instructional scaffolding are essential in supporting literacy and language learning (Hammond, 2020; Kim & Quinn, 2013).

The present study addresses this gap by examining the competencies, readiness, instructional strategies, and challenges of ALS teachers in teaching Filipino in the Division of Science City of Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, Central Luzon, Philippines. Specifically, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing subject-specific evidence on Filipino instruction within ALS, particularly in relation to out-of-field teaching, teacher readiness, learner literacy needs, and institutional support. By focusing on Filipino instruction in a non-formal education context, the study extends existing ALS literature beyond general implementation concerns and highlights the pedagogical and content-related issues that affect language teaching in ALS.

The findings of this study may inform the Department of Education, ALS program implementers, school leaders, teacher education institutions, and policymakers in designing targeted professional development programs and developing appropriate instructional resources for Filipinos. More importantly, the study supports the broader goal of inclusive education by addressing the learning needs of marginalized learners who depend on ALS as an alternative pathway to literacy, lifelong learning, and social inclusion.

This study aimed to examine the competencies, readiness, instructional strategies, and challenges of Alternative Learning System teachers in teaching Filipino in the Division of Science City of Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, Central Luzon, Philippines.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What competencies do ALS teachers demonstrate in teaching Filipino, particularly in terms of content knowledge, instructional delivery, and assessment practices?
2. How ready are ALS teachers to teach Filipino in relation to training, instructional resources, and institutional support?
3. What instructional strategies and methodologies do ALS teachers use in teaching Filipino?
4. What challenges do ALS teachers encounter in teaching Filipino?

The Alternative Learning System in the Philippines

The creation of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) demonstrates the commitment of the Philippine government to providing open and accessible education. Commonwealth Act No. 80 began efforts to provide education to adults and the illiterate, and initiated the first programs in literacy and adult education. These initial programs gradually built a more complex education system to serve the needs of out-of-school youth and adult learners. Executive Order No. 356 (2004) reinforced the framework for non-formal education, and ALS was institutionalized later with the signing of the Republic Act No. 11510 (Alternative Learning System Act of 2020). The Act defines ALS as a parallel learning system that is flexible, learner-centered, and community-based (DepEd, 2020; UNESCO, 2019). Regardless of the solid policy provisions,

the existing literature shows that ALS implementation continues to have systemic constraints. Scholars (Albert *et al*., 2024; Baccal & Ormilla, 2021; Hero & Cruz, 2023) argue that the effectiveness of ALS is influenced by how policies are implemented across local contexts and by the objectives they are intended to achieve.

Several studies assessed ALS implementation in the Philippines. Albert *et al*. (2024) conducted a large-scale process evaluation involving surveys, interviews, and FGDs, finding that while teachers demonstrate strong dedication, ALS faces persistent resource shortages; budget allocation remains at only 0.1% of DepEd's budget despite serving 0.8% of learners. Teacher-learner ratios are high, and facilities are substandard, yet learner satisfaction is notable. Similarly, Baccal and Ormilla (2021) highlighted positive ratings for instructional materials, facilities, and stakeholder participation in Isabela province, Philippines, though variations in implementation effectiveness across districts were evident. Hero and Cruz (2023) further examine the enhanced ALS or ALS 2.0 in Central Luzon, finding alignment with strategic goals but identifying weaknesses in linkages and instructional delivery.

Teaching Strategies and Methodologies within ALS

ALS' flexibility and learner-centeredness reflect the diversity of ALS learners. ALS teachers implement contextualized teaching approaches, differentiated instruction, and modular learning to cater to the diverse literacy and learning needs of ALS learners (Parto & Yango, 2023; Villastique & Ubayubay, 2025). The flexibility of these approaches enables teachers to respond to differences in learners' abilities, circumstances, and learning needs, making adaptability a key strength of the ALS system. Despite the continuing development of ALS, however, a significant gap remains in the literature concerning pedagogical approaches for teaching different subject areas within the system, particularly **Filipino**. Language teaching requires specialized pedagogical approaches, strategies, and techniques, such as scaffolding, communicative approaches, and responsiveness to linguistic diversity. However, few studies examine how ALS teachers use these strategies when teaching Filipino. Given this gap in literature, this study directly highlights the need for a more concentrated investigation into the competencies that ALS teachers demonstrate in teaching Filipino, particularly in terms of content knowledge, instructional delivery, and assessment practices.

Teacher Readiness in Teaching Filipino

Teacher readiness, including competence, professional training, and resource availability, significantly impacts the success of ALS. ALS teachers are flexible and innovative, applying learner-centered strategies and serving as facilitators, mentors, and community coordinators (Parto & Yango, 2023; Arzardon & Nato, 2015). However, readiness is variable and multidimensional, more so in the context of language teaching.

Filipino teachers face challenges owing to the inadequate pedagogical and assessment structures to support teaching. ALS teachers employ learning-centered teaching strategies despite the lack of necessary language proficiency and teaching-related assessment skills (Casingal, 2025; Lopez, 2019). Compounding these challenges are the poorly resourced and low-quality teaching and learning-support systems (Albert *et al*., 2024). Frequent and inadequate training of teachers, especially in language teaching, further worsens the situation (Francisco & Buri, 2024).

Teacher readiness goes beyond the skills of individual teachers, but also includes systemic conditions. Teacher workload, available resources, and training significantly affect readiness (Estabillo & Linga, 2025). Most studies on teacher readiness focus on teaching, in general, and not in Filipino. Understanding the interaction between the resources and training on teacher readiness available to teachers is vital in developing Filipino teaching skills.

Challenges Encountered by ALS Teachers

Challenges remain a recurring theme in the ALS literature. Paez (2024, 2025) documented barriers including limited face-to-face interactions, curriculum mismatches, heavy workloads, and insufficient facilities. Similarly, Baccal and Ormilla (2021) emphasized the continuing need for financial support and technical assistance for ALS implementers. At the learner level, financial difficulties, family responsibilities, and limited time further constrain sustained participation in ALS programs (Osawa, 2021; Wayas & Dinoro, 2023).

Teachers' narratives reinforce these findings. Sumawang *et al.* (2022) reported that mobile teachers endure long, unsafe travels to reach learners, contributing to stress and burnout. Francisco and Buri (2024) highlighted negative perceptions of ALS that teachers must overcome, while Estabillo and Linga (2025) and Lozada (2022) noted the continuing challenge of sustaining learner engagement.

Challenges documented in ALS research reflect the conditions seen in the present study, where limited resources, inconsistent learner attendance, and heavy workloads affect teachers' readiness to teach Filipino effectively. These constraints, combined with the demands

of out-of-field teaching and the emotional strain of navigating difficult work environments, make it harder for teachers to sustain learner engagement, an essential element in Filipino instruction. This context highlights how the experiences of ALS teachers in the Division of Science City of Muñoz align with broader systemic issues, underscoring the need to examine how such challenges shape their competencies and preparedness in delivering Filipino lessons.

Challenges in Teaching Filipino within ALS

Filipino, as a core component of the Communication Skills strand, plays a crucial role in literacy development, cultural identity formation, and critical citizenship. However, despite its importance, the literature reveals gaps in research on how ALS teachers specifically handle the teaching of Filipino subjects.

While existing studies discuss ALS teachers' general competencies, readiness, and challenges, few address these issues in the context of Filipino language instruction. The multilingual realities of learners, many of whom are more proficient in regional dialects or English, further complicate the teaching of Filipino. This creates a pressing need to explore how teachers manage competencies, readiness, and challenges in this area, and what support systems are necessary to enhance instruction.

Synthesis of Literature and Research Gap

Several gaps are revealed in this literature review. Firstly, literature does not combine teaching methods/training, challenges, and teacher preparedness. Currently, the literature understands ALS teaching separately. It does not consider the many ways these components relate to each other within educational settings. Secondly, literature lacks subject-specific analyses, particularly of teaching Filipino. Most studies talk about teaching methods in the broadest sense and ignore the particular challenges teaching languages present. Thirdly, although literature acknowledges multilingualism as a challenge, it lacks empirical studies about its impact on the teaching of Filipino and student outcomes. Finally, although many context-specific studies exist, they do not examine how these challenges manifest in particular local realities. Thus, the current study addresses the challenges of teaching Filipino through the ALS by discussing the methods and techniques ALS Filipino teachers use, describing the challenges ALS Filipino teachers face, and assessing teachers' readiness in terms of the required competencies and the availability of resources and training. It also offers ways to improve teaching methods in this context.

The novelty of this study lies in its subject-specific examination of Filipino instruction within the ALS context. While previous studies have commonly discussed ALS implementation, learner participation, teacher commitment, and resource limitations, fewer studies have examined how ALS teachers manage the pedagogical and content-related demands of teaching Filipino. This study is framed by the view that teacher readiness is shaped not only by general teaching competence but also by subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical preparation, and the ability to contextualize instruction for diverse and marginalized learners. Through this framing, the study contributes to existing scholarship by linking out-of-field teaching, Filipino language instruction, and non-formal education within one analytical discussion.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study employed focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured individual interviews to explore the experiences, competencies, and challenges of Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers in teaching Filipino. The focus group discussion was conducted first to identify shared experiences and key issues, which informed the subsequent semi-structured individual interviews that enabled participants to elaborate on their perspectives and experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its small sample size, which included only nine (9) ALS teachers from a single school division, thus restricting the breadth of perspectives captured. As a study focused solely on the Division of Science City of Muñoz, the findings may not fully represent ALS teachers' experiences in other regions or divisions with different contexts and resources. Additionally, the study examined challenges specifically in teaching Filipino, which narrows the scope and does not account for issues encountered in other learning strands. These limitations may affect the generalizability of the results; however, the depth of the qualitative data provides valuable insights into the lived realities of ALS teachers handling Filipino instruction.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The study employed complete enumeration, wherein all eligible ALS teachers assigned to teach Filipino in the Division of Science City of Muñoz, Nueva Ecija were included as participants (Etikan & Bala, 2017). A total of nine (9) ALS teachers participated in the study. To be eligible, participants had to be currently assigned to teach

Filipino in the ALS program within the division and willing to participate in the focus group discussion and semi-structured individual interviews. Teachers who were not handling Filipino at the time of data collection were excluded from the study.

The Division of Science City of Muñoz was selected as the study site because preliminary coordination with ALS implementers revealed that several ALS teachers assigned to teach Filipino had undergraduate specializations outside Filipino or language education. This context provided an appropriate setting for examining the teachers' competencies, readiness, instructional strategies, and challenges in teaching Filipino.

Table 1 presents the profile of the participants in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, field of specialization, and length of service.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of ALS Teachers

Socio-demographic Characteristics		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	<25 (entry)	2	22.22
	25–34 (early career)	5	55.56
	35–44 (established)	1	11.11
	45–54 (mid-late)	1	11.11
Gender	Male	4	44.44
	Female	5	55.56
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	5	55.56
	Master's Degree	4	44.44
Field of Specialization	Elementary Education-Generalist	4	44.44
	Secondary Education - Filipino	1	11.11
	Secondary Education - Social Studies	2	22.22
	Secondary Education - English	1	11.11
	Secondary Education - TLE	1	11.11
Length of service	2–4 yrs	2	22.22
	5–9 yrs	3	33.33
	10–14 yrs	4	44.44
	15–19 yrs	1	11.11

The participants varied in age, gender, educational attainment, field of specialization, and length of service. Most participants were between 25 and 34 years old with 10 to 14 years of teaching experience. Only one participant specialized in Filipino, while the majority came from Elementary Education-Generalist, Social Studies, English, and TLE backgrounds. These profile characteristics provide important methodological context for understanding the participants' experiences in teaching Filipino in ALS.

Ethical Considerations and Data Privacy

The study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants to safeguard their rights, welfare, and privacy. Ethical approval was granted by the Central Luzon State University's Ethics Review Committee prior to data collection, and all procedures complied with the approved protocols and institutional research guidelines.

All participants provided written informed consent after receiving information about the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and their right to decline or withdraw at any time without penalty. Only those who voluntarily consented were included in the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning identification codes to participants and reporting findings only in aggregate form. The study also complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) by ensuring that personal information was used solely for research purposes, securely stored, and accessible only to the researcher. These measures protected participants' rights, privacy, and the confidentiality, integrity, and security of all research data throughout the study.

Data Collection Method

Data collection was conducted in two sequential phases. First, a focus group discussion was conducted to explore participants' shared experiences, perspectives, and preliminary insights regarding the research topic. The themes that emerged from the FGD informed the subsequent semi-structured individual interviews, which allowed for a more in-depth exploration of participants' personal experiences and viewpoints. Prior to each data collection activity, rapport was established with the participants to foster a comfortable and open environment for discussion. The researchers explained the purpose of the study, obtained informed consent, and assured participants of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation. With participants' permission, all focus group discussions and individual interviews were audio-recorded. The recordings were securely stored in a password-protected Microsoft OneDrive folder accessible only to the research team. Subsequently, all recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data for analysis.

Data Analysis

The study utilized thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework that emphasizes a systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting

patterns within qualitative data. This method allowed the researchers to identify recurring themes that reflect the participants' shared experiences and perspectives generated from the Focus Group Discussions. It was chosen for its analytical flexibility and its ability to produce detailed, insightful, and credible interpretations of qualitative data. Through this approach, the researchers were able to organize complex participant narratives into coherent themes that answered the study's research questions. The analysis includes the process of familiarization, systematic coding, and marking significant statements, concepts, and linguistic patterns relevant to the research objectives. These initial codes were then organized and refined through a comparative process to capture both semantic (explicit) and latent (underlying) meanings within the data. From the coded segments, candidate themes were developed by identifying recurring patterns, clustering related ideas, and evaluating conceptual coherence. These themes were further examined, defined, and validated to ensure analytic rigor, internal consistency, and alignment with the broader context of the study.

Results and Discussion

Teaching Strategies and Methodologies

The data highlight the varied teaching strategies and methodologies used by ALS teachers, including reliance on Filipino as the primary medium of instruction, frequent oral explanation and repetition, differentiated assessments such as the Functional Literacy Test, and supplementary livelihood training. These practices show teachers' adaptability in addressing learners' comprehension and engagement gaps, particularly in mixed-level classes. This finding supports Francisco and Buri's (2024) observation that ALS teachers rely heavily on adaptive strategies when resources are insufficient and aligns with Casingal's (2025) conclusion that teachers compensate for gaps in assessment and training through improvisation.

At the same time, the continued absence of structured pedagogical preparation echoes the concerns raised by Hero and Cruz (2023) regarding weak teaching–learning linkages in ALS 2.0, suggesting that the instructional challenges in Filipino persist due to systemic and training-related limitations. Francisco and Buri (2024) similarly noted that ALS teachers often depend on adaptive strategies to cope with learner diversity and limited resources, though these stop short of formalized instructional frameworks. Casingal (2025) also underlined the necessity for tiered professional development, noting that although ALS teachers are excellent at collaborative strategies, they struggle with assessment and evaluation.

Similarly, Villastique and Ubayubay (2025) highlighted that learner outcomes are directly impacted by the quality of instruction, which is heavily influenced by teacher education and training. Their results demonstrate the critical role that ongoing professional development plays, especially in helping students develop their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. All these observations point to the urgent need for organized professional development and sufficient resource support to improve teaching strategies even though ALS teachers exhibit creativity and adaptability in their work.

Table 2. Teaching Strategies and Methodologies

Theme	Code	Quote
Teaching Strategies and Methodologies	Use of Language Instruction	P1: *Mas naiintindihan kung nagsasalita ng Filipino.* *(It is easier to understand when Filipino is used.)* P2: *So yung Filipino nakatulong po sa kanila para mas naiintidihan po nila… yun po yung uunahin nating ituro sa kanila.* *(So Filipino, help them understand better… that is what we should teach them first.)* P2: *Kaya mas pinagtutuunan po namin na ituro ang Filipino compare sa English.* *(That is why we focus more on teaching Filipino compared to English.)* P3: *Kahit English yung subject, hindi puwedeng mag-pure sa English dahil wala nang magrerespond.* *(Even if the subject is English, we cannot speak purely in English because no one will respond.)* P4: *Kapag subject na English, hirap po sila. Kaya ineexplain at isinasalin po namin sa Filipino.* *(When it comes to English subjects, they have difficulty. So we explain and*

		translate the lessons into Filipino.)
	Instructional Approaches & Delivery	P4: *Kahit Math, ang medium of instruction talaga ay Filipino.* *(Even in Math, the actual medium of instruction is Filipino.)* P5: *Pagsasalita, yung nag-eexplain ako sa kanila. Yung instruction ko, yung paliwanag ko.* *(Speaking, when I explain to them. My instructions also serve as my explanations.)* P3: *Pagsasalita at pakikinig po.* *(Speaking and listening.)* P9: *Pagsasalita at panunuod po. Yung mga learners mas gusto nila yung nanunuod.* *(Speaking and watching. The learners prefer activities that involve watching.)* P2: *Irereview po ulit yung lesson. Uulitin po.* *(We will review the lesson again. We will repeat it.)*
	Assessment and Differentiation	P9: *Gagamit ka ng ibang strategy o motivation para makuha ang attention.* *(You need to use a different strategy or motivation to get their attention.)* P6: *Upon enrollment po kasi may kina-conduct po kaming test. Functional Literacy Test.* *(Upon enrollment, we administer a test—the Functional Literacy Test.)*
	Supplementary Learning / Skills Training	P6: *Separate yung session nila sa session ng elementary.* *(They have a different session from the elementary students.)* P1: *Nagbibigay kami ng livelihood training tulad ng skirting, garment tech. Kaya lang kailangan din i-refresh ito talaga.* *(We provide livelihood training such as skirting and garment technology. But these really need to be refreshed as well.)*

The data reveal that ALS learners face multiple challenges, including low literacy and foundational skills, writing difficulties, lack of adaptability and motivation, and issues with class composition and behavior. Teachers noted that some learners can write their names but cannot read them, others struggle with comprehension and grammar, while many find it difficult to construct cohesive sentences or adapt to lessons regardless of age. These issues are consistent with Francisco and Buri (2024), who found that ALS teachers often deal with diverse learner needs, limited time, and negative perceptions, requiring adaptive strategies to address learners' low literacy.

Similarly, Hero (2022) reported that ALS senior high school learners showed only moderate acquisition of 21st-century skills, with socio-economic conditions significantly affecting literacy and learning outcomes, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. Also, Ucab and Luzano (2023) discuss that despite financial difficulties and personal struggles, learners' resilience and the support of their families were critical in sustaining their participation and achieving academic progress. These studies highlight that literacy gaps, motivational concerns, and complex classroom dynamics require not only refinement but also stronger systemic support to foster learner engagement and ensure success.

Table 3. Learner-Related Challenges

Theme	Code	Quote
Learner-Related Challenges	Low Literacy and Foundational Skills	P5: *Isa po BLP po—No read, No write po.* *(One is BLP—No read, no write.)* P2: *Nakakasulat ng pangalan pero hindi kayang basahin ang pangalan niya.* *(They can write their name but they cannot read their own name.)* P6: *Meron learner na di nakakabasa pero gumagamit ng cellphone.* *(There is a learner who cannot read but uses a cellphone.)* P8: *Pagbasa, reading comprehension.* *(Reading, reading comprehension.)*

	P3: *May mga learners na mahina sa reading. Yung iba, nakakabasa pero walang comprehension.* *(Some learners are weak in reading. Others can read but have no comprehension.)*
	P4: *Mahina sa pagbasa, di nakapagsulat, pati grammar, bantas, at pagsasalita.* *(They are weak in reading, cannot write, and have difficulties with grammar, punctuation, and speaking.)*
Writing Difficulties	P2: *Sa FLT essay, putol-putol ang konstruksyon, hirap sa paggamit ng tuldok, comma, question mark.* *(In the FLT essay, the construction is fragmented, and they struggle to use periods, commas, and question marks.)*
	P6: *Nagpagawa ako ng sanaysay, pero numbering ang ginawa. Wala sa paragraph form, walang tuldok at malaking titik.* *(I asked them to write an essay, but they wrote it as numbered points. It wasn't in paragraph form, and it lacked periods and capital letters.)*
	P6: *Sa enrollment form, "mother tongue" nilagay ay "nanay".* *(On the enrollment form, under 'mother tongue,' they wrote 'nanay' (mother).*
Learner Adaptability & Motivation	P1: *Mga learners, bata man o matanda, hindi talaga nag-aadapt.* *(Learners, whether young or old, really do not adapt.)*
	P2: *Nakaka-challenge turuan kahit sobrang dali na nung lesson.* *(It is challenging to teach them even when the lesson is already very easy.)*
	P6: *Mangilan-ngilan lang po talaga yung nag-eexcel.* *(Only a few truly excel.)*
Class Composition & Behavior	P2: *Magkasama ang elementary at junior high sa isang class.* *(Elementary and junior high students are together in one class.)*
	P3: *Before, hinihiwalay ko ang elementary (MWF) at JHS (TTH).* Before, I separated the elementary group (MWF) from the JHS group (TTH).
	P3: Ratio 20–40 learners. (There are about 20–40 learners.)
	P6: Session ay medyo maingay. (The session is quite noisy.)
	P9: May 10–15 learners; sa OSY, nasa 50. (here are 10–15 learners; for out-of-school youth (OSY), there are about 50.)

The absence of specialization in Filipino among many ALS teachers poses a substantial instructional challenge. A considerable number of instructors come from non-Filipino majors, such as the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED), and consequently struggle with content mastery, spelling accuracy, and the demands of handling multiple subject areas. This situation reflects a broader issue in ALS like limited subject-specific preparation which often compels teachers to engage in self-directed learning and improvisation to meet the instructional needs of their learners. Albert *et al*. (2024) highlighted that while ALS teachers are highly dedicated, systemic shortages in training and resources hinder their ability to fully meet learners' needs, making subject specialization gaps more pronounced.

Similarly, Hero and Cruz (2023) noted weaknesses in teaching and learning linkages under the ALS 2.0 Strategic Plan, suggesting that gaps in teacher expertise must be addressed through targeted professional development and curriculum alignment. Adding to this, Estabillo and Linga (2025) emphasized that while teachers' commitment remains high, sustaining learner engagement and optimizing resources are persistent challenges, reinforcing the need for specialized training in core subjects like Filipino. Collectively, these studies affirm that

without structured support and specialization pathways, ALS teachers will continue to face difficulties in delivering quality Filipino instruction.

Table 4. Teacher-Related Challenge

Theme	Code	Quote
Teacher-Related Challenge	Lack of Specialization in Filipino	P2: *Hindi ko major ang Filipino, kaya hindi ako bihasa sa content. Nahihirapan kapag tinatanong ang tamang baybay.* *(Filipino is not my major, so I am not proficient in the content. I struggle when asked about correct spelling.)*
		P3: *Hindi rin bihasa, lalo na dahil multi-teaching kami sa ALS. Nagkakaroon ng kalituhan.* *(I'm also not proficient, especially because we do multi-teaching in ALS. It causes confusion.)*
		P8: *BEED ang major, kaya kailangan pang pag-aralan ang Filipino specialization.* *(My major is BEED, so I still need to study the Filipino specialization.)*

The findings reveal that systemic and institutional challenges continue to hinder the effectiveness of ALS delivery, with teachers citing outdated training (last attended in 2019), the absence of ALS-specific programs, insufficient books, and the pressure of DepEd assessment policies that sometimes compel teachers to compromise standards. Francisco and Buri (2024) similarly found that ALS teachers often cope with limited materials and insufficient institutional support by resorting to resilience and adaptive strategies, rather than receiving structured capacity-building opportunities. Likewise, Albert *et al.* (2024) highlighted how minimal budget allocation and resource shortages constrain ALS implementation nationwide, underscoring why teachers face recurring gaps in training and materials. Adding to this, Hero and Cruz (2023) observed that the ALS 2.0 Strategic Plan, while operational, still exhibited weaknesses in teaching and learning linkages suggesting that systemic gaps at the policy and institutional level must be addressed to strengthen ALS teacher preparation and ensure the sustainability of the program.

Table 5. Systemic/Institutional Challenges

Theme	Code	Quote
Systemic/ Institutional Challenges	Training and Program Gaps	P6: *Mas malaking focus sa English kasi tina-Tagalog lang naman.* *(There is a bigger focus on English because it is just translated into Filipino anyway.)*
		P6: *Sa Matatag, wala pa. 2019 pa yung training namin.* *(For MATATAG, there's nothing yet. Our last training was still in 2019.)*
		P6: *Walang separate program training for ALS.* *(There is no separate program training for ALS.)*
	Resources and Materials	P6: *Nangangailangan ng gano'ng klaseng books, pero iilan lang.* *(We need those kinds of books, but there are only a few.)*
	DepEd and Assessment Pressures	P7: *Sa DepEd, pag di nakabasa ang bata, balik sa teacher ang sisi. Kaya minsan ipinapasa na lang para hindi negative ang dating.* *(In DepEd, when a child cannot read, the blame goes back to the teacher. So sometimes learners are just passed to avoid appearing negative)*

Francisco and Buri (2024) similarly found that ALS teachers often cope with limited materials and insufficient institutional support by resorting to resilience and adaptive strategies, rather than receiving structured capacity-building opportunities. Likewise, Albert *et al.* (2024) highlighted how minimal budget allocation and resource shortages constrain ALS implementation nationwide, underscoring why teachers face recurring gaps in training and materials. Adding to this, Hero and Cruz (2023) observed that the ALS 2.0 Strategic Plan, while operational, still exhibited weaknesses in teaching and learning linkages suggesting that systemic gaps at the policy and institutional level must be addressed to strengthen ALS teacher preparation and ensure the sustainability of the program.

Table 6. Readiness and Competencies of ALS Teachers

Theme	Code	Quote
Readiness and Competencies of ALS Teachers	Educational Background and Training	P4: *BEED po. Kaya may sapat na kaalaman naman sa pagtuturo ng ALS.* *(I am a BEED graduate. So I have sufficient knowledge in teaching ALS.)*
		P6: *Meron last time, sinama po kami sa Matatag Curriculum.* *(There was one last time that we were included in the MATATAG Curriculum training.)*
	Challenges in Subject-Matter Competence	P1: *Filipino major ako dati, pero nahirapan kaya nagpalit ng major. Hanggang ngayon, hirap pa rin sa Filipino. Kapag may di maintindihan, nagche-check sa YouTube para makahanap ng mas maayos na discussion.* *(I used to be a Filipino major, but I struggled, so I changed my major. Even now, I still find Filipino subjects difficult. When there's something I don't understand, I check YouTube to find clearer explanations.)*

Most ALS teachers demonstrated baseline readiness based on their educational backgrounds, yet their competencies in teaching Filipino varied due to non-Filipino specializations and insufficient training. As a result, they relied on improvised strategies, such as YouTube tutorials, to address knowledge gaps. This finding resonates with Casingal's (2025) study, which identified assessment and evaluation as persistent weak points among ALS teachers and recommended tiered professional development alongside stronger resource integration. Albert *et al.* (2024) stressed that nationwide shortages in resources and inadequate training continue to constrain the delivery of ALS, often leaving teachers reliant on personal strategies rather than structured institutional support. Likewise, Paez (2025) emphasized that without specific training that ALS teachers need, such as on pedagogy/andragogy, reengineering, and curriculum alignment, teachers struggle with subject-matter instruction, highlighting the urgent need for professional development programs.

Conclusion

This study examined the competencies, readiness, instructional strategies, and challenges of ALS teachers in teaching Filipino in the Division of Science City of Muñoz. The findings suggest that the teachers demonstrated basic competencies in instructional delivery and assessment, but their content knowledge varied, particularly among those without a specialization in Filipino. Their readiness also appeared limited by insufficient Filipino-specific training, instructional materials, and institutional support. To address learners' diverse needs, the teachers used translation, repeated explanation, oral discussion, audiovisual materials, differentiated activities, literacy assessment, and contextualized tasks. However, they encountered learner-related challenges, including low literacy, weak comprehension, writing difficulties, limited motivation, irregular participation, and mixed-level classes. They also experienced difficulties associated with out-of-field teaching, multiple teaching assignments, outdated training, and limited resources. These findings suggest that effective Filipino instruction in ALS may depend on the combined influence of teachers' subject knowledge, pedagogical preparation, access to appropriate resources, and institutional support.

Recommendation

The Department of Education and concerned school divisions may provide Filipino-specific professional development for ALS teachers, particularly in content knowledge, literacy instruction, differentiated teaching, assessment, and material development. They may also develop updated and contextualized Filipino learning resources for learners with varied literacy levels. Mentoring and peer-support mechanisms may be provided for teachers handling Filipino outside their specialization. Partnerships with higher education institutions may also help provide subject-specific training, instructional resources, and professional guidance. Future research may include ALS teachers from other school divisions, compare Filipino majors and non-Filipino majors, and examine how teacher preparation and institutional support may influence instructional practices and learner outcomes.

Ethical Statement

The researcher adhered to ethical standards by securing informed consent from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and they were clearly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exists in relation to the conduct or publication of this research. All procedures complied with institutional and ethical guidelines, and no financial or personal relationships influenced the study's design, implementation, or findings.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this work, the authors utilized ChatGPT and Grammarly to enhance grammar, spelling, and clarity in the manuscript. Following the use of these tools, the authors conducted a review and made necessary modifications, assuming full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contributions

JMP: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft, Resources, Supervision; **AGC:** Conceptualization, Formal Analysis; **ACB:** Formal Analysis, Writing - Review and Editing; **KBS:** Resources; Writing - Review and Editing; **BJVCJ:** Methodology, Writing - Review and Editing.

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