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BEYOND SUBJECTS TAUGHT: PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHING OUTSIDE THEIR SPECIALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of public school teachers teaching subjects outside their specialization. It aimed to identify their challenges, adaptation strategies, and professional growth while examining how school support influences teaching quality. A qualitative phenomenological design was used. Fifteen Grade 6 public school teachers participated through in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and shared meanings. Teaching outside specialization brings both challenges and growth. Teachers face difficulties in content mastery, lesson preparation, assessment design, and instructional confidence, which affect clarity of lessons and student understanding. Despite this, teachers adapt through continuous learning, peer collaboration, resourcefulness, and flexible learner-centered strategies. These experiences strengthen problem-solving, time management, and professional confidence over time. Results also show that limited training, insufficient materials, and staffing gaps continue to challenge teachers assigned outside their field. With proper support, teachers can improve performance and maintain instructional quality. Schools should provide targeted training, mentoring, and adequate resources, and ensure appropriate subject alignment to enhance teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes. Furthermore, structured professional development programs and collaborative learning communities can help teachers share practices, deepen content knowledge, and sustain motivation. Continuous monitoring and feedback from school leaders can guide improvement and strengthen accountability. Overall, effective out-of-field teaching depends not only on subject expertise but also on teachers' willingness to learn, adapt, and reflect, supported by enabling school conditions and clear policies frameworks.

KEYWORDS: *Teachers' perspective; teaching outside specialization*

INTRODUCTION

In Asia, the issue of out-of-field teaching is prevalent, particularly in countries facing educational disparities. For instance, in China, the "structural teacher shortage" in many primary schools has led to numerous cases of out-of-field teaching, especially in rural areas where qualified teachers are scarce (Ma, 2024). Similarly, in Vietnam, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) university teachers have reported that teaching outside their area of expertise can either hinder or enhance their sense of competence, depending on their self-efficacy and role perception (Tran, 2023).

In the Philippines, the situation mirrors these regional challenges. A significant number of high school teachers are handling subjects they did not major in during college, with reports indicating that 62% of high school teachers are teaching outside their specialization. This misalignment between teachers' qualifications and their teaching assignments can lead to difficulties in delivering quality education. Teachers often face challenges in developing effective instructional strategies and assessments for subjects they are not specialized in, which can affect student learning outcomes (Javines, 2024).

In Mindanao, the situation is particularly concerning. Studies have shown that out-of-field teachers in Western Mindanao, especially those teaching science subjects, encounter significant challenges. These include difficulties in selecting appropriate teaching strategies, addressing students' queries, and establishing authority in the classroom. Moreover, the lack of professional development opportunities and support exacerbates these challenges, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to support out-of-field teachers in the region (Javines, 2024).

In the Sto. Tomas West District of the Davao del Norte Division, a contextual, methodological, and substantive gap was evident in relation to teachers teaching outside their specialization. Contextually, there was a lack of localized research that captured the specific lived experiences of teachers within the district, as most existing studies were conducted in broader or different settings. Methodologically, prior studies had primarily employed descriptive approaches, with limited use of phenomenological methods that could provide an in-depth understanding of teachers' perspectives and coping mechanisms. Substantively, while challenges were commonly identified, there was insufficient focus on how teachers managed these challenges and the insights they gained from their experiences, particularly in relation to their professional development and instructional practices.

The urgency of this research was underscored by the ongoing challenges in the education sector, exacerbated by factors such as teacher shortages, administrative decisions, and the evolving demands of the curriculum. Understanding the perspectives of teachers who were teaching outside their specialization was crucial for developing effective strategies to support them, enhance their professional development, and ultimately improve student learning outcomes.

The social relevance of this study lied in its potential to inform educational policies and practices that promote equitable and quality education for all students. By highlighting the challenges and coping mechanisms of out-of-field teachers, the study could contribute to the development of support systems that addressed their needs. The findings could be disseminated through academic publications, policy briefs, and professional development programs, ensuring that the insights gained reach stakeholders at various levels of the education system.

THE STUDY'S OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers assigned to teach subjects outside their specialization in Sto. Tomas West District, Davao del Norte. Specifically, it sought to understand their perspectives regarding out-of-field teaching, identify the coping mechanisms they employed in managing instructional challenges, and draw meaningful insights from their experiences that may contribute to improved teacher support and instructional practice.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with ten teacher participants and a focus group discussion with five additional participants, capturing both individual and shared experiences. The findings aim to provide a clearer understanding of the implications of this practice, particularly in relation to teacher confidence, instructional effectiveness, and professional development.

METHODOLOGY

This section presented the methods used, source of data, sampling technique, data gathering instrument, procedure of the study, data analysis and ethical consideration of the study, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding how teaching beyond one's specialization influences professional growth, instructional practices, and classroom outcomes in the public elementary schools.

Method Used

The conduct of this study was anchored on a qualitative approach, framed within the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms. It was grounded in the philosophical assumptions of ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and rhetoric, which collectively provide the foundation for its direction and implementation.

Ontology. Ontology concerns the nature of reality and what is recognized as existing within it (Pretorius, 2024). In the context of this study, reality was regarded as subjective and multifaceted, constructed through the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers as they taught subjects outside their specialization. This reality was not experienced uniformly; rather, teachers interpreted and constructed their own understanding depending on their professional background, years of service, areas of specialization, and the specific instructional contexts in which they operated. For some, teaching beyond their specialization may be experienced as an opportunity for professional growth and skill development, whereas for others, it may be perceived as challenging due to limited content knowledge, workload pressures, or uncertainty in instructional effectiveness. Recognizing these multiple realities affirmed the ontological stance of the study, which valued diverse perspectives and acknowledged that no single account could fully capture the complexity of teaching outside one's specialization in public elementary schools.

Epistemology. Moreover, epistemology guided this study by addressing the nature of knowledge and the processes through which it is generated, validated, and interpreted (Pretorius, 2024). In this context, knowledge emerged through the reflections and narratives of teachers as they described their experiences in managing unfamiliar subjects. Rather than assuming knowledge to be universal or fixed, the study emphasized that understanding develops through interpretation, dialogue, and professional experience, thereby illuminating the ways teachers perceived challenges, employed coping strategies, and gained insights while navigating teaching beyond their expertise.

Axiology. In addition, the study was grounded in axiology, which considers the role of values and ethics in the research process (Pretorius, 2024). It recognized that the values, beliefs, and experiences of both the researcher and participants influence the conduct and interpretation of the study. While steps were taken to mitigate bias, the subjectivity inherent in qualitative research was regarded as essential for understanding. Teachers' professional judgments, ethical considerations, and emotional responses were treated as integral contributions that deepened insights into how they experienced teaching beyond their specialization, adapted to challenges, and cultivated professional growth within their schools.

Methodology. Furthermore, the methodological assumption provided the framework for data generation and analysis. Methodology refers to the philosophical orientation that informs the selection of research strategies appropriate to the objectives of the study (Khan et al., 2023). In qualitative inquiry, this approach relied on inductive reasoning to interpret meanings as they emerge from participants' lived realities rather than imposing preconceived frameworks. This study adopted a phenomenological design to systematically explore the experiences of public elementary school teachers as they navigated the challenges, coping strategies, and insights associated with teaching subjects outside their specialization.

Rhetoric. The rhetorical assumption also underpinned this study, shaping how findings are communicated (Ayton et al., 2023). Unlike positivist research, qualitative inquiry employs rich, descriptive, and contextually grounded language that conveys meaning through the voices of participants. In this study, findings were presented through thematic analysis and narrative description, highlighting the challenges teachers encountered, the strategies they implemented to manage these challenges, and the insights they gained that contributed to professional development and instructional improvement.

Qualitative research represents an approach to inquiry that prioritizes the exploration and in-depth understanding of complex social realities. In contrast to quantitative research, which emphasizes numerical measurement, variables, and statistical relationships, qualitative inquiry seeks to generate rich descriptions and meaningful interpretations that provide insight into human experiences and contextual processes. It focuses on understanding participants' perceptions, interactions, and lived experiences, thereby addressing questions concerned with meaning, context, and explanation rather than frequency or magnitude. Such research may be conducted as a stand-alone design, relying exclusively on qualitative evidence, or integrated within mixed-methods frameworks where it complements quantitative data to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Naeem et al., 2023).

In the context of this study, the qualitative design provided a framework for public elementary school teachers to articulate their experiences in teaching subjects outside their specialization, including the challenges posed by limited content knowledge, increased workload, and instructional uncertainty. Furthermore, it captured the coping strategies they employed, such as collaborative engagement with colleagues, adherence to professional values, and adaptive teaching practices that sustain instructional effectiveness despite these challenges. Additionally, the study highlighted the insights teachers generate, which inform strategies to enhance professional growth, instructional adaptability, and the overall learning environment. Through reflexive interpretation, the researcher presented narrative accounts that conveyed the depth and complexity of teachers' lived experiences, thereby advancing understanding of how educators navigated teaching beyond their specialization.

This study employed a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology, as a methodological framework, focuses on uncovering the essential nature of a phenomenon as it is lived and experienced by individuals who directly encounter it. Its central objective is to interpret and articulate the meaning inherent in these experiences, emphasizing not only the observable events but also the subjective ways in which they are perceived, understood, and internalized (Frechette et al., 2020).

In examining the various orientations of phenomenology, it is important to recognize their shared emphasis on the phenomenon itself. Essentially, phenomenology examines human experiences as they unfold within the context of life, highlighting how individuals perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to these experiences. Its primary focus lies in the systematic exploration of lived realities as subjectively experienced. Through careful reflection and rigorous analysis, phenomenology generates deeper interpretations and new insights that can expand, refine, or transform existing understandings of these experiences (Dodgson, 2023).

Accordingly, this study adopted a phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers as they teach subjects outside their specialization. It uncovered their reflections, perceptions, and interpretations regarding the challenges they encountered, the strategies they employed to manage these challenges, and the professional growth that arose from such experiences. Utilizing in-depth interviews and focus group discussion, the study captured the essence of teachers' experiences, identifying recurring themes that illustrated both the difficulties inherent in teaching unfamiliar subjects and the adaptive responses implemented to navigate these challenges. Emphasizing the subjective perspectives of teachers, the research provided a nuanced understanding of how teaching outside one's specialization was experienced in public elementary schools. Consequently, the study underscored the value of teacher narratives in informing practices, professional development, and supportive strategies that enhance instructional effectiveness and adaptability.

Sources of Data

This phenomenological study involved fifteen participants who satisfied the selection criteria established to align with the research objectives. Among these, ten participants provided data through in-depth interviews (IDIs), while five engaged in a focus group discussion (FGD). The determination of this sample size followed the recommendation of Subedi (2021), which suggested that phenomenological research typically included between three and fifteen participants to generate rich and meaningful insights. Such a sample was considered sufficient to achieve data saturation, thereby ensuring that the lived experiences of participants were accurately represented within the study.

Data Gathering Instrument

Qualitative data were collected through various approaches, including interviews, observations, and the use of audio-visual materials. In alignment with these methods, the study utilized in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as the primary techniques to explore the phenomenon and obtain rich, contextually grounded insights from participants (Bazen et al., 2021). Participants responded to carefully constructed open-ended questions, which allowed them to provide detailed narratives of their experiences and perspectives. These accounts facilitated a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and supported the identification of recurring patterns, concepts, and thematic elements within the data.

The in-depth interview represents a fundamental method in qualitative inquiry, enabling the researcher to obtain comprehensive information directly from participants. This approach is particularly suitable for examining individuals' experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and other dimensions relevant to the study. Interviews are conducted with specific research objectives in mind, ensuring that each interaction contributes meaningfully to addressing the research questions (Monday, 2020). During this process, participants were regarded as experts of their own lived experiences, while the researcher assumed the role of an attentive listener. Through the use of thoughtfully designed open-ended questions, participants were encouraged to provide reflective, detailed, and nuanced responses, generating valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

In this phenomenological study, participants articulated their experiences in their own words through in-depth interviews. The researcher adapted the sequence and phrasing of questions and introduced additional prompts as necessary to elicit more thorough and meaningful responses, as well as to clarify emerging points. This approach captured the essence of participants lived experiences and to generate insights that inform the identification of key themes. Throughout data collection, the researcher maintained neutrality, avoiding verbal or nonverbal cues that could influence participants' narratives, thereby ensuring the credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of the data obtained.

Additionally, focus group discussions were conducted with public elementary school teachers serving as Grade 6 level who have handled multiple subjects beyond their expertise and have been teaching for three years. This method provided a structured environment to elicit both individual and collective insights into their experiences in teaching

subjects outside their specialization. As noted by Mwilongo (2025), focus group discussions allow participants to clarify and expand on their perspectives while engaging with the viewpoints of others, enhancing the richness and validity of the data. Within this framework, participants were encouraged to openly share ideas, reflect on professional practices, and collaboratively examine the challenges and strategies associated with their instructional responsibilities. Follow-up questions were employed as needed to deepen the discussion and uncover multiple dimensions of their experiences, supporting the identification, verification, and refinement of emerging themes.

Furthermore, data collection occurred in settings that were convenient and comfortable for participants, including their workplaces whenever feasible. The study gathered information through ten in-depth interviews and five focus group discussions. To enhance the depth, credibility, and contextual understanding of the findings, supplementary sources such as scholarly articles, journals, and books were consulted, offering diverse perspectives, empirical evidence, and theoretical frameworks relevant to the investigation of public elementary teachers' experiences in teaching subjects outside their specialization.

In this study, the research utilized methodological triangulation. It is a research strategy that involves using multiple methods to study the same phenomenon, enhancing the credibility and validity of findings by providing a more comprehensive perspective and reducing the potential biases associated with a single method. This approach was particularly valuable in qualitative research, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of complex social phenomena. By combining different methods, researchers can cross-verify data, leading to more robust and reliable conclusions. For instance, integrating interviews with observations or document analysis can offer a richer, more detailed picture of the research subject. The use of methodological triangulation is widely recognized as a means to strengthen the rigor and depth of qualitative studies. Valencia (2022) defined triangulation as the combination of multiple methods in studying the same object or event to better address the phenomenon researched.

In this study, methodological triangulation was employed by integrating in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) to explore the experiences of teachers handling subjects outside their specialization. Using IDIs allowed for a deep understanding of individual perspectives, while FGDs captured collective insights and encouraged discussion of shared challenges and strategies. By combining these methods, the study cross-validated findings, enhanced the credibility of results, and provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Sampling Technique

The study utilized purposive sampling for participant recruitment, as this approach offered a focused and effective strategy for qualitative inquiry. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental sampling, entails the deliberate selection of individuals who possess specific characteristics or qualifications relevant to the research focus. As a non-probability method, it does not rely on a predetermined theoretical framework or fixed sample size, allowing the researcher to identify participants whose experiences can provide comprehensive and meaningful insights (Campbell et al., 2020).

Moreover, the inclusion, exclusion, and withdrawal criteria had been carefully established to ensure that the data collected were credible, relevant, and aligned with the study's objectives. Participants consisted exclusively of public elementary school teachers serving as Grade 6 level who have handled multiple subjects beyond their expertise and have been teaching for three years, as their professional roles and experiences are expected to yield substantive insights into teaching subjects outside their specialization. Teachers who did not meet these criteria, such as those in other grade levels or with less than three or more than five years of service, were excluded to preserve the focus and integrity of the study. Participants might withdraw from the study at any point, safeguarding their autonomy and rights throughout the research process. This selection framework ensured that participants were appropriately positioned to provide informed and authentic accounts that contributed to the study's goals.

Procedure of the Study

The collection of research data in this study proceeded in a series of systematic stages. As noted by Lau and Bratby (2023), qualitative data may be gathered through focus group discussions, direct observation of participants' professional settings, and the review of relevant audio-visual materials.

Seeking Approval from the Ethics Committee. At the beginning of the data collection process, I sought authorization from the Ethics Committee to confirm that the research adhered to established ethical guidelines. This step included

submitting a comprehensive proposal that detailed the study's purpose, research design, and any possible risks to participants. The committee evaluated the proposal to verify that participants' safety, rights, and confidentiality are properly safeguarded. When ethical clearance was granted, I moved forward with the next stages of data gathering while ensuring that ethical conduct and integrity are always upheld.

Asking Approval from Authorities. After receiving clearance from the Ethics Committee last November 4, 2025, I requested official endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School at Rizal Memorial Colleges (RMC) last November 15, 2025, and obtained an authorization letter from the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) of Davao del Norte last December 11, 2025. These formal approvals were required to implement the study within the designated educational setting. I prepared and submitted a written request outlining the research objectives, target participants, and the procedures to be undertaken last January 12, 14, 20, and 23, 2026. Gaining approval from these key authorities ensured institutional backing and legitimacy for the conduct of the study.

In preparation for gathering data, I developed an interview guide that served as the primary instrument for collecting insights. This guide included open-ended questions designed to explore how teachers coped with the challenges of teaching subjects beyond their specialization. I ensured that each question was clear, relevant, and reflective of the teachers' experiences. When the guide was drafted, I requested evaluation and feedback from field experts last October 28, 29, and 30, 2025 to verify its content validity and ensured it effectively captured the information needed for the study.

Securing Informed Consent. Before conducting the interviews, I first secured informed consent from each participant. This step involved providing them with detailed information about the study's purpose, objectives, and their role in the process. I emphasized that participation was completely voluntary and that they had the freedom to withdraw at any time without facing any negative consequences. To ensure their full understanding, I discussed the procedures clearly and obtained their written consent prior to starting the interviews. This process upheld ethical principles and safeguards the participants' rights and autonomy.

Administration of the Instrument and Interviews. After obtaining informed consent, I proceeded to conduct interviews with the chosen participants following the established interview protocol. Individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions were carried out to allow teachers to share their experiences, coping strategies, and insights about teaching subjects beyond their specialization. The sessions took place in a secure and comfortable setting to foster open and honest communication. All discussions were audio-recorded with the permission of the informants and participants to ensure reliable documentation.

Transcribing, Translating, and Analyzing the Data. Following the completion of the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim to ensure that every detail of the participants' responses was accurately represented. Statements expressed in the local language were translated into English when necessary to support a clear and consistent analysis. After the transcription and translation processes, I examined the data through a phenomenological lens, focusing on identifying recurring themes and significant patterns that revealed the essence of the participants' experiences. The analysis interpreted the authentic lived experiences of the teachers.

Endorsement to the Data Analyst. Once the transcription and analysis of the data were completed, I sought the expertise of a qualified data analyst to review the findings. The analyst assessed whether the analysis was thorough and truly represented the collected data. This process was essential to confirm the reliability and trustworthiness of the research outcomes. After receiving the analyst's feedback, I incorporated the necessary revisions and finalize the analysis for the study's final presentation.

Data Analysis

Humble and Mozelius (2022) delineated five essential stages in qualitative data analysis: data logging, anecdotes, vignettes, data coding, and thematic analysis. Within the framework of this study, particular emphasis was placed on data coding and thematic analysis, which were employed to systematically organize and interpret the rich narratives provided by participants. These processes enabled the transformation of raw accounts into meaningful categories and themes, thereby ensuring a coherent and rigorous analysis of the qualitative data.

Data coding serves as a foundational technique for organizing qualitative information, transforming extensive raw data into smaller, meaningful units that are directly relevant to the research questions. This process enables the segmentation of data into manageable portions, from which salient patterns and concepts can be identified. As emphasized by Kiger and Varpio (2022), codes that appear consistently across the data are more likely to develop into prominent thematic categories. In this study, the researcher employed highlighters and colored pens to visually distinguish recurring and significant ideas within the transcripts of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Segments identified with the same color were grouped together and labelled with concise phrases that accurately represented the emerging thematic constructs.

Following coding, thematic analysis was conducted to identify, interpret, and synthesize patterns within the data while distinguishing unique content into coherent categories (McLeod, 2024). This method facilitates a structured evaluation of which data segments constitute meaningful themes before undertaking more nuanced interpretation, thereby enabling a comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived experiences. In this study, thematic analysis advanced from initial coding to a more detailed examination, organizing responses from general observations to specific insights. Similar ideas were clustered to form coherent themes, with each theme supported by at least three core data points to ensure validity. Additionally, unique code identifiers were assigned to participants to maintain systematic organization and uphold confidentiality throughout the analytic process, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness and rigor of the study's findings.

The study used the analytical framework of Paul Colaizzi (1978), as cited in Praveena and Sasikumar, to guide the analysis of qualitative data. This method provided a clear and systematic process for understanding participants lived experiences. It involved carefully reading the interview transcripts, identifying significant statements, interpreting their meanings, and organizing them into themes. The approach emphasized staying close to the participants' actual accounts to preserve the authenticity of their experiences while allowing a deeper interpretation of the data.

In this study, Colaizzi's framework was applied to analyze the interviews of teachers handling subjects outside their specialization. The method helped generate clear and meaningful insights from the data. By following its structured steps, the analysis remained faithful to the participants' narratives and ensured that the findings were credible, consistent, and reflective of their real experiences.

Analyze the Interviews. The first phase of Colaizzi's analytical framework involved an in-depth exploration of the collected interview data. In this research, I started by meticulously reviewing the transcribed interviews, engaging closely with the participants' accounts to gain a deep understanding of their lived experiences. Each transcript was read several times to ensure full familiarity with the content and to grasp the broader context of their responses. This process allowed for the identification of subtle meanings and intricate details within each teacher's account, forming a strong basis for the next stages of analysis. Emphasizing the richness and complexity of the data ensures that all meaningful insights were thoroughly acknowledged and incorporated into the interpretation.

Identify Key Phrases. When the interview analysis was completed, I identified and extracted important phrases and notable statements from the data. These excerpts reflected the core experiences and viewpoints of teachers who handled subjects beyond their area of specialization. Particular attention was given to expressions that highlighted the difficulties they encountered and the methods they used to manage these teaching responsibilities. Selecting these key statements made it possible to pinpoint the most relevant and insightful portions of the data.

Identify Meanings and Coding. After pinpointing the key phrases, I proceeded to interpret their meanings and assign corresponding codes to each relevant segment of data. These codes functioned as markers that encapsulated the core ideas and emerging themes within the participants' responses. This phase played a crucial role in structuring and organizing the collected information, thereby facilitating deeper and more systematic analysis. Through the process of coding, recurring concepts and patterns across the interviews can be identified.

Organize Codes into Groups. After coding the data, I arranged the codes into clusters according to their similarities or interconnections. This process facilitated the identification of broader themes that reflected the different dimensions of the participants' experiences. Grouping the codes supported the structure of the analysis and highlighted the key factors affecting the transition process. This approach ensured that all relevant aspects of the data were captured, providing a thorough and coherent representation of the participants' perspectives.

Describe the Phenomenon. At this point, the aim was to develop a thorough description of the phenomenon based on the teachers' lived experiences. The themes and insights identified in the earlier phases were combined to create a cohesive and detailed narrative. This account emphasized the difficulties teachers faced and the approaches they used to address the demands of teaching subjects beyond their field of expertise. Crafting this comprehensive description enabled a deeper and more integrated understanding of their overall experiences.

Identify the Fundamental Structure. In this phase, I identified the fundamental structure of the phenomenon by focusing on the key elements that characterized how teachers handled teaching assignments beyond their specialization. The themes that emerged from the analysis were carefully reviewed, giving particular attention to the most influential factors that shape their transition experience. This process allowed for the formulation of conclusions regarding the essential components of teachers' lived experiences. Defining this core structure offered a clear understanding of the elements that influenced their adjustment process and underscored the critical factors that contribute to successful adaptation in the school setting.

Validate the Findings. In the final phase, the results were verified through feedback from both the participants and field experts. The extracted themes and detailed descriptions were presented to the participants to ensure that the interpretations genuinely reflect their lived experiences. Additionally, a group of experts or peers evaluated the analysis to determine its accuracy, validity, and methodological soundness. This validation process enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, confirming that they were firmly rooted in the participants' actual accounts. Engaging in this review strengthens the dependability of the study's outcomes and ensures that its conclusions are solidly supported by the collected data. In accordance with Colaizzi's method, the interview data were systematically examined to reveal significant insights and construct a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of school administrators in the Davao del Norte Division.

Figure 1 shows the processes of Colaizzi's thematic analysis which were applied in analyzing the data of the study. Each step, including reviewing interview transcripts, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and constructing a comprehensive description, provided a systematic and rigorous approach to analysis. Using Colaizzi's method ensured that the participants' own words were central to the interpretation, preserving the authenticity of their lived experiences while revealing underlying patterns and themes. This structured procedure captured the depth and complexity of the teachers' experiences, offering a clear and credible understanding of how they handled teaching subjects outside their specialization.

The procedure followed a clear and systematic sequence, which involved reading and familiarizing with the interview transcripts, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings from these statements, clustering meanings into themes, developing a comprehensive description of the phenomenon, validating the findings with participants, and incorporating necessary revisions. Each stage contributed to a rigorous and organized analysis, ensuring that important ideas were carefully examined and accurately represented.

Through this method, the participants' own words remained central to the interpretation, preserving the authenticity of their lived experiences. At the same time, the process enabled the researcher to identify common patterns and deeper meanings across the data. As a result, the structured approach provided a clear, credible, and in-depth understanding of how teachers experienced and managed the challenges of teaching subjects outside their specialization.

Ethical Consideration

This research gave paramount importance to the observance of ethical standards to ensure that the inquiry was carried out with integrity, transparency, and respect for all participants. Within the framework of qualitative investigation, ethical considerations were embedded throughout every phase of the study, with explicit attention given to delineating its scope and limitations in order to promote clarity and accountability. These ethical obligations were closely aligned with the methodological stance of the research, particularly the responsibility to protect the confidentiality, anonymity, and authenticity of participants' narratives and lived experiences. In line with this, the study adhered to the ethical protocols prescribed by the Rizal Memorial Colleges Ethics Review Committee.

Social Value. The social significance of this study resided in its ability to foreground the perspectives of public elementary school teachers concerning their engagement in teaching subjects outside their specialization. The research would provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges they encountered, the strategies they employed to manage these demands, and the meaningful contributions they offered to enhance instructional practices and professional development. Such insights would foster professional agency, encourage collaborative practices, and support shared responsibility within educational institutions. Moreover, the findings would offer valuable guidance for school leaders,

policymakers, and stakeholders in developing supportive structures that would acknowledge teacher experiences, cultivate institutional trust, and advance the overall quality of education for learners.

Informed Consent Form. The researcher ensured that informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their engagement in the study. Each teacher received a comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose, objectives, and scope, including a detailed overview of the procedures, potential risks, and anticipated benefits associated with participation. Participants were informed of their right to decline involvement or withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences. The consent process involved the provision of a written informed consent form, which specified confidentiality protocols, the management of collected data, and assurances that personal information remained anonymous. Participants afforded adequate time to review the document, seek clarification, and indicate their voluntary agreement to participate.

Vulnerability of Research Participants. The researcher implemented deliberate measures to protect the well-being and confidentiality of participants throughout the study. Acknowledging that teachers may experience apprehension in sharing personal experiences related to teaching subjects outside their specialization, the researcher fostered a supportive, nonjudgmental, and respectful environment during data collection. Sensitive topics were addressed with care, and participants were assured that their responses remained confidential and anonymous. Emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of participation, with participants informed that they might decline to respond to any question or withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Furthermore, interactions were organized to minimize emotional or professional discomfort, and all data were managed under strict security protocols to prevent unauthorized access.

Benefits, Risk, and Safety. The researcher implemented measures to ensure that teacher participation in the study was both meaningful and secure, while potential risks were carefully mitigated. Participants were informed of the anticipated benefits of the research, including opportunities for professional reflection, articulation of instructional experiences, and contributions toward enhancing practices related to teaching subjects outside their specialization. Concurrently, any potential risks, such as emotional discomfort or concerns regarding professional implications, were explicitly communicated, and strategies were employed to minimize their impact. Data collection was conducted within a safe and respectful setting, ensuring that interactions did not compromise participants' emotional, professional, or psychological well-being. In addition, the researcher upheld strict confidentiality and anonymity, implemented secure management and storage of data, and reinforced participants' right to withdraw at any stage of the study. Collectively, these measures safeguard participants' welfare while promoting an ethically sound and supportive research environment.

Privacy and Confidentiality of Information. The researcher upheld the privacy and confidentiality of all information provided by participants throughout the study. Personal identifiers were removed or systematically coded during data collection and analysis to prevent the disclosure of participants' identities, while all research materials, including interview transcripts and recordings, were securely stored in password-protected files accessible solely to the researcher. Participants were informed that their responses remained strictly confidential and were presented in a manner that aggregates or anonymizes individual perspectives. Any dissemination of findings, whether in written reports or presentations, conveyed participants' narratives without revealing identifying information. These safeguards protected the integrity of participants' personal and professional data.

Justice. The researcher adhered to the principle of justice, ensuring that all participants were treated with fairness, equity, and respect throughout the study. Participant selection was guided by clear, non-discriminatory criteria that provided equal opportunity for eligible teachers to share their experiences, irrespective of background, tenure, or personal characteristics. The researcher ensured that the benefits of participation, such as contributing to a deeper understanding of teaching subjects outside specialization and informing educational practices, were accessible to all participants, while potential burdens or risks were equitably distributed and minimized.

Transparency. The researcher ensured transparency throughout the study by providing participants with detailed, accurate, and comprehensible information regarding the purpose, objectives, procedures, and anticipated outcomes of the research. Teachers were fully informed about the scope of their involvement, the methods of data collection and analysis, and the manner in which findings were presented. Any limitations, potential risks, and the measures implemented to safeguard participants' rights and well-being were clearly communicated, enabling teachers to make informed decisions regarding their participation. Additionally, regular updates and opportunities for clarification were offered, fostering an atmosphere of openness and trust. This approach promoted accountability, enhanced participants'

confidence in the research process, and upheld the ethical principle of conducting inquiry with integrity and transparency.

Conflict of Interest. The researcher upheld the principle of impartiality throughout the study, ensuring the absence of any conflict of interest and maintaining professional boundaries at all stages. No financial, personal, or institutional affiliations existed that could affect the design, conduct, analysis, or reporting of the research. Decisions concerning participant selection, data collection, and interpretation of findings were guided exclusively by the study's objectives and ethical standards, without conferring advantage or disadvantage to any individual or group. Furthermore, the researcher refrained from influencing participants' responses, allowing teachers to articulate their experiences freely and authentically. Collectively, these measures preserved the integrity of the study, fostered trust among participants, and upheld the ethical standard of conducting research in an objective and unbiased manner.

Qualification of the Researcher. The researcher ensured her readiness to conduct the study through relevant academic preparation and research training. Aside from the subjects she had taken, she was guided throughout the research process by her adviser, panelists, validators, and a statistician, who helped refine and improve the quality of the paper. This guidance, along with her foundational knowledge of qualitative research, enabled her to properly gather, analyze, and present the data. Through this combined support and training, the researcher was able to carry out the study with clarity, accuracy, and adherence to research standards.

Adequacy of Facilities. The researcher ensured that adequate facilities were available to support the effective execution of the study through careful planning and coordination with the host institution. Suitable venues were arranged for interviews and focus group discussions, providing a quiet, comfortable, and secure setting that allowed participants to share their experiences without distraction. Essential materials and resources, including recording devices, notebooks, and writing instruments, were prepared to facilitate accurate and efficient data collection. Consideration was also given to accessibility and convenience for participants, reducing logistical challenges that could hinder engagement or participation.

Results

This study explored the experiences of Grade 6 public school teachers teaching subjects outside their specialization. It examined the challenges they faced, coping strategies employed, and professional growth achieved.

Perspectives of Teachers Teaching Outside Their Specialization

Three primary themes emerged:

1. **Instructional Challenges** – Teachers reported limited content knowledge, difficulty explaining complex concepts, and varied learner readiness. These factors affected confidence, lesson delivery, and assessment. Examples include:
    - "I struggle to teach lessons because I need to study the subject first." (IDI-P4)
    - "I find it hard to explain algebra and word problems." (IDI-P6)
    - "Some learners are below expected levels, so I adjust my teaching approach." (FGD-P5)
2. **Adaptive Teaching and Instructional Flexibility** – Teachers applied learner-centered strategies, contextualized content, and interactive activities to meet diverse needs. They simplified lessons, connected content to real-life contexts, and used group and hands-on activities:
    - "I adjust lessons step-by-step so students can understand better." (IDI-P1)
    - "I use real-life examples to make lessons meaningful." (FGD-P1)
3. **Professional Growth and Teaching Resilience** – Teachers developed confidence, adaptability, and reflective skills through continuous learning, preparation, and classroom experience. They embraced flexible roles and viewed challenges as opportunities for growth:
    - "I realized teaching outside my specialization helps me grow professionally." (IDI-P10)
    - "Preparation and experience increase my confidence in teaching." (IDI-P3)

Coping Strategies

Teachers' strategies were grouped into three themes:

1. **Strategic Content Preparation and Resource Use** – Independent study, online resources, and structured lesson guides enhanced mastery and instructional clarity.
2. **Collaborative and Support-Seeking Practices** – Peer collaboration, mentorship, and professional learning improved teaching effectiveness.
3. **Instructional Adaptation and Learner-Centered Implementation** – Simplifying lessons, contextualizing content, and using differentiated strategies ensured engagement and learning.

Insights

Teachers' experiences suggest that teaching outside one's specialization promotes:

- **Professional growth** through continuous learning and preparation.
- **Instructional adaptability** by responding to learner needs and contextualizing lessons.
- **Teaching resilience** through confidence-building, reflective practice, and flexible roles.

These findings highlight that effective out-of-field teaching relies on proactive learning, adaptive strategies, and supportive school environments rather than prior specialization alone.

Summary

This study examined the experiences of public school teachers who are assigned to teach subjects beyond their area of specialization. It focused on identifying the difficulties they encounter in out-of-field teaching as well as the insights and skills they develop through these experiences. The findings revealed that teachers commonly face challenges related to limited content familiarity, increased preparation time, and the responsibility of addressing diverse learning needs in the classroom. These circumstances often require teachers to move beyond routine teaching practices and adopt more intentional approaches to instruction.

Despite these challenges, the results showed that teachers employ a range of coping strategies that allow them to manage their responsibilities effectively. Many participants engaged in continuous learning, sought assistance from colleagues and more experienced educators, and maximized available instructional materials to strengthen their understanding of unfamiliar subjects. Teachers also adjusted their teaching methods by emphasizing learner-centered and flexible approaches that support student engagement and comprehension. Through these strategies, teachers were able to balance instructional demands while maintaining meaningful classroom interaction.

The study further highlights that teaching outside one's specialization can serve as a source of professional development when appropriate support is present. Teachers gained confidence, adaptability, and reflective skills that contributed to their overall teaching competence. While out-of-field teaching presents notable difficulties, it also creates opportunities for growth that help teachers become more resilient, reflective, and effective educators.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that teaching subjects outside one's specialization presents both significant challenges and meaningful opportunities for professional growth. Public school teachers assigned to unfamiliar subjects often experience difficulties related to content mastery, lesson preparation, and instructional confidence. These challenges demand greater effort, adaptability, and commitment from teachers as they seek to meet instructional standards and learners' needs.

At the same time, the experiences associated with out-of-field teaching encourage teachers to strengthen their professional skills. Through continuous learning, collaborative engagement, and flexible instructional practices, teachers are able to transform challenges into avenues for improvement. Teaching beyond one's specialization promotes deeper reflection on instructional strategies, enhances problem-solving abilities, and builds professional confidence over time. Overall, the study underscores that effective teaching in out-of-field contexts is not solely dependent on subject specialization, but also on teachers' willingness to learn, adapt, and reflect, supported by appropriate institutional conditions

Recommendations

1. **For policymakers**, it is recommended that sustained professional development programs be designed to specifically support teachers handling subjects outside their specialization. Training initiatives may focus on strengthening content knowledge, improving instructional flexibility, and promoting learner-centered strategies. Providing adequate instructional resources and manageable teaching assignments can further support teachers' effectiveness and well-being.
2. **For school administrators**, creating a supportive and collaborative school environment is essential. Administrators are encouraged to promote peer mentoring, collaborative lesson planning, and professional dialogue among teachers assigned to unfamiliar subjects. Recognizing teachers' efforts and providing ongoing guidance can help strengthen their confidence and resilience.

3. **For teachers**, continued engagement in reflective practice, lifelong learning, and instructional adaptability is encouraged. Teachers may benefit from actively seeking professional support, participating in self-directed learning, and applying learner-centered approaches to address diverse student needs.
4. **For future researchers**, further studies may explore out-of-field teaching using different research designs, larger samples, or varied educational contexts. Future research may also examine the long-term effects of teaching outside one's specialization on teacher performance, well-being, and student learning outcomes, as well as assess the effectiveness of institutional support mechanisms.

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