



NAVIGATING PEDAGOGICAL DILEMMAS: INSIGHTS FROM ENGLISH TEACHERS HANDLING NON-SPECIALIZED SUBJECTS

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra21850>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra21850

ABSTRACT

This study explained the pedagogical dilemmas of handling non-specialized subjects from the perspective of English teachers in private and public schools. It examines how the challenges significantly impact students' academic performance. A total of ten (10) participants are considered in this study who joined the in-depth interview and focused group discussion, respectively. Five of them participated in the in-depth interview (IDI) while the remaining participants attended the focus group discussion (FGD). Phenomenological research is the main basis for gathering all information in this study since it involves understanding the universal experience through interviews with subjects and examining their views about their experience. The result highlighted the challenges and opportunities in teaching subjects beyond specialization, emphasizing the role of educators' expertise in promoting effective and quality education. The result revealed that while the phenomenon is evident and significantly improves educators' competencies in cross-disciplinary teaching, several challenges hinder its effectiveness. It also discusses how school administrators can play a pivotal role in providing professional development for teachers to acquire the subject competencies based on the curriculum and support student success in non-specialized subjects. These limitations create operational difficulties, affecting school performance, teachers' pedagogical approaches, and students' learning experiences. The study highlights the implications of these findings for educational institutions, school administrators, and stakeholders.

KEYWORDS: *Non-Specialized Subjects, Non-Specialized Teachers, Pedagogy, Pedagogical Dilemma*

INTRODUCTION

The field of specialization in academia is a course of study or an area of concentration where individuals gain expertise. They possessed specific knowledge and skills about their field of specialization that can be deemed above the basic and general understanding of the subject. Mismatch, on the other hand, is related to the incongruence of work-related positions in academia in the sphere of education. Additionally, most teachers are concerned about the mismatch of teachers and subjects, which has been a topic of much discussion. In most public and even private educational institutions, quite a few teachers are assigned to teach subjects not aligned with their specialization. Unfortunately, the call of duty outweighs the core's shortcomings. The occurrence of instructing subjects beyond one's area of specialty, wherein educators possess insufficient educational qualifications, has been neglected.

This is a significant concern, as highly skilled educators may become inadequately prepared if assigned to teach particular subjects without sufficient training or study. Inadequately qualified educators may adversely affect student progress and hinder the educational process (Merril et al., 2015).

In Germany, research indicates that instructing outside of one's area of expertise adversely affects the teacher's self-efficacy, thereby influencing the learners' performance. Porsh and Wendt (2015) assert that children instructed by non-specialist educators demonstrate diminished self-esteem.

In addition, Hobes (2015) discovered that one of the elements impacting instructors' efficacy is the subject they teach. As a result, when teachers teach subjects relating to their areas of interest, they foster a welcoming learning atmosphere that leads to a high-quality education. More studies have demonstrated that teachers' sense of identity, overall well-being, teaching performance, and self-esteem are all influenced by their field of specialization.

Sharplin (2017) re-conceptualized rural teachers' experiences teaching across specializations in Western Australia, finding that this phenomenon can influence both teachers' perception of efficacy and attrition rates. According to the study's findings, communities and schools can help out-of-field instructors gain knowledge and strategies for dealing with the negative impacts of mismatch. According to Price (2015), the Education Workforce Initiatives Report from the Western Australian Department of Education and Training proposes using flexible learning and "expert teachers" to guide affected teachers.

In South Korea, there is a significant mismatch between the number of trained teachers and the need for high school students to teach courses in which they are unqualified. However, in reaction to this, the Korean government developed Minor Qualification, which allows professors to teach courses other than their areas of specialization.



This stimulates and pushes educators to expand their knowledge to tackle a new subject. The scenario clearly shows that the issue of field teaching must be supported, recognized, and resolved (Kim, 2016).

Similarly, out-of-field instruction constitutes a substantial yet long-ignored concern within Philippine schools and the broader educational landscape. It has been an unprioritized concern because schools have assumed that this is not an issue but a teacher's responsibility. According to research, teachers who were put in charge of teaching courses unrelated to their area of expertise experienced a range of challenges, opportunities, optimism, and flexibility (Agusto, 2019).

Meanwhile, Guzman (2015) indicated that instructing beyond specialized subjects presents significant challenges, and educators voice apprehension regarding the current conditions. The teachers' deficiency in confidence about the instruction of concepts was evident through their preparation of lessons, formulation of lesson plans, selection of suitable teaching methodologies, clarification of students' misconceptions, choice of relevant learning activities, and connection of lectures to real-life contexts. These issues were particularly prevalent in public schools, particularly those that struggle to recruit qualified instructors to instruct specific subjects. In this type of scenario, educators encounter substantial obstacles when it comes to adjusting to the new subject they will be teaching.

This study's findings can inform curricular and policy improvements, ensuring that English teachers and future teachers have the necessary professional development and resources to handle such teaching tasks. By determining common pedagogical dilemmas encountered by English teachers in non-specialized contexts, this research could lead to better and improved policies on teacher training, subject allocation, and professional assistance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges in teaching English to Indigenous learners has increasingly highlighted the complex interplay of linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic factors that affect language acquisition (Bishop & Glynn, 2021). One of the key challenges is the linguistic gap between Indigenous languages and English. Many Indigenous learners grow up speaking their native languages, which often differ significantly in structure and phonology from English (O'Donnell et al., 2020).

Indigenous languages are typically oral and have unique syntactic patterns, which can create difficulties when students transition to written English (Hinton, 2020). This linguistic distance, coupled with limited bilingual education programs, often results in language barriers that hinder the development of literacy and fluency in English (Parsons et al., 2022). Moreover, code-switching between Indigenous languages and English in the classroom can complicate English learning, as students may struggle to distinguish between the two languages when it comes to academic contexts (Blair & Flett, 2020; Carter, 2020; Clemens & Young, 2022; Christensen, 2020).

In addition to linguistic challenges, there is a pervasive cultural disconnect between the mainstream education system and Indigenous worldviews and learning styles. Indigenous learners often come from communities that prioritize community-based learning, experiential knowledge, and oral traditions over the individualistic and formalized structure of mainstream schooling (McCarty & Lee, 2022). These cultural differences can make it difficult for students to engage with traditional English language instruction, which is often designed with a Western pedagogical framework that does not account for Indigenous values or learning practices (Baker, 2021).

Studies have shown that Indigenous students are more likely to succeed in learning environments that respect and integrate their cultural perspectives, yet the lack of culturally relevant teaching resources or curricula remains a significant barrier (McCarty et al., 2021). This disconnect not only affects English language acquisition but also contributes to higher dropout rates and disengagement from schooling among Indigenous students (Laliberte et al., 2022).

A related challenge in teaching English to Indigenous learners is the lack of teacher preparedness and professional development in culturally responsive teaching practices. Many teachers in mainstream schools are not adequately trained to address the linguistic and cultural needs of Indigenous students (Hinton & Hale, 2021). A study by O'Donnell et al. (2020) found that teachers often lack awareness of the specific challenges faced by Indigenous learners, including the need for differentiated instruction, the incorporation of students' native languages, and the application of culturally relevant pedagogical strategies.

Moreover, professional development programs rarely focus on Indigenous issues, leaving educators without the tools they need to foster an inclusive and supportive environment (Hinton, 2021). Teachers' insufficient understanding of Indigenous students' experiences can result in misinterpretation of their needs, underestimation of their potential, and the reinforcement of stereotypes, all of which can impede the success of English language instruction (Baker, 2021).

Seemingly, socio-economic and systemic barriers significantly impact the ability of Indigenous learners to develop English language skills. Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by poverty, limited access to educational resources, and inadequate infrastructure, which can directly hinder students' academic success (Laliberte et al., 2022; Bovenschen & Marlow, 2020; Cohen, et al. 2018). A report by the Canadian Education Association



(2020) found that schools serving Indigenous students often face challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, outdated materials, and limited access to technology, all of which can impede language learning.

Finally, socio-economic factors such as housing instability, lack of transportation, and food insecurity create further obstacles for Indigenous students in maintaining consistent attendance and engagement in school (Parsons et al., 2022; Brady & Williams, 2022; Dwyer, 2021; Canagarajah, 2020).

Research Questions

Developing instructional strategies for handling non-specialized subjects presents a complex dilemma for English teachers. These teachers face many challenges while attempting to maintain their students' interest and motivation in learning. This study sought to investigate the pedagogical challenges and coping mechanisms that English teachers encounter while teaching out-of-field subjects.

Enabling them to enhance their instructional methods and facilitate student success through the collection of firsthand experiences. The results will contribute to higher-quality education by ensuring that instructional strategies align with curriculum objectives and educational standards.

1. What are the challenges of English teachers in handling non-specialized subjects?
2. What are the coping strategies of English teachers in handling non-specialized subjects?
3. What are the teaching insights of English teachers in handling non-specialized subjects?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In the next section, I described the specific details of pedagogical dilemmas and coping strategies of English teachers handling non-specialized subjects research procedures to ensure that future researchers can generalize the results from this study to other situations. I provided extensive and careful descriptions of the time, place, context, and culture of the study to develop transferability, which is the qualitative parallel to external validity in post-positivist research (Mertens, 2010). This section includes: (a) discussing the interview approach; (b) explaining my role as the researcher; and (c) describing the sampling method and ethical considerations.

Phenomenological research was the primary method for acquiring all of the information, as it required comprehending universal experience through interviews with subjects and assessing their perspectives on their experience. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative study that delves deeply into non-numerical data and employs interviews and observation notes.

This study is particularly interesting as it documents a non-existent media entity. Many participants will be tasked with recalling, in detail, an organization they no longer work for and may not have fond recollections of. I relied heavily on the semi-structured interview format to gather rich and detailed data, ensuring that I captured the participants' experiences and nuances of their perspectives.

Research Participants

In my qualitative research study, I selected participants based on their relevance to the research topic and their ability to provide rich and meaningful data. I created a supportive and non-judgmental environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. For this study, I applied purposeful sampling, where participants met predefined criteria. The most prominent criterion was their experience with the phenomenon under study, specifically, how senior high school English teachers navigate pedagogical dilemmas when handling non-specialized subjects.

Research Instrument

In this study, I used semi-structured interviews as the primary research instrument to gather data on the pedagogical dilemmas faced by senior high school English teachers handling non-specialized subjects. The semi-structured interview format allowed me to ask open-ended questions while also providing flexibility to explore emerging themes based on the participants' responses. By using this format, I ensured that the interviews were focused on key aspects of the research, such as the challenges teachers face, their coping strategies, and the impact of these subjects on student engagement. This approach allows for rich, in-depth data that reflects the lived experiences of the participants, providing insights into their unique perspectives and practices (Schensul et al., 2019).

The interview guide consists of both general and specific questions, developed to address the research objectives. I designed the questions to explore several key areas, including the teachers' firsthand experiences with teaching non-specialized subjects, their perceptions of the challenges they faced in handling these out-of-field subjects, strategies they used to overcome these challenges. Additionally, I inquired about their reflections on how these subjects impact student learning and engagement.

While the guide provided a structure, I also allowed flexibility for participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely, ensuring that their voices were heard in an open and supportive environment. I also recorded the interviews with participants' consent and transcribed them for detailed analysis. The transcriptions were analyzed using thematic coding, allowing me to identify patterns and themes that address the research questions. Through this process, I aimed to uncover meaningful insights into how teachers navigated pedagogical dilemmas in non-



specialized subjects, which contributes to the broader understanding of teacher experiences in diverse educational contexts.

Data Analysis

In this study, I employed qualitative data analysis to examine the text from interview transcripts, recognizing that qualitative analysis differs significantly from quantitative methods. While quantitative analysis is focused on statistical models and objectivity, qualitative analysis relies heavily on my interpretive skills and understanding of the social context in which the data was gathered. Instead of seeking to predict or explain outcomes, my goal in the qualitative analysis was to interpret and make sense of the participants' experiences, particularly in the context of the pedagogical dilemmas faced by senior high school English teachers handling non-specialized subjects.

This process required a creative, inquisitive approach, guided by ethical awareness and a deep contextual understanding of the participants' lived experiences. My approach to analyzing the data was grounded in strategies from classic works like Miles and Huberman's (1984) text on qualitative research methods, which helped me to draw meaningful insights from the data and contribute to a richer understanding of this complex social phenomenon.

Qualitative data analysis allowed me to explore and interpret the emotions, perceptions, and experiences of the senior high school English teachers, providing deeper insight into how they understood their world and navigated challenges in teaching non-specialized subjects. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on numerical measurements, qualitative data enables me to capture the rich, contextual details of human experience. I conducted a thorough analysis of the data to identify patterns, themes, and underlying meanings, which provided a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives.

This detailed, nuanced approach helped me uncover subtle aspects of how these teachers approach their work and how their experiences impact students' learning and academic performance. Organizing the data analysis around major components of the teachers' viewpoints allowed me to focus on specific aspects of their experiences, resulting in a more comprehensive and targeted analysis.

To analyze the data obtained from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, I used Robert Colaizzi's method of qualitative analysis, developed in 1978. This method is specifically designed to uncover the underlying meanings and essences of participants' experiences. Colaizzi's approach involves a structured, step-by-step process that helped me systematically examine the data, identify themes, and highlight the key structures within the participants' responses.

By following this method, I ensured that the analysis remained rooted in the participants' lived experiences and was faithful to their perspectives. Additionally, I drew on principles of descriptive phenomenology, particularly as developed by Edmund Husserl. This method focuses on describing the essential features and structures of a phenomenon without attempting to explain or interpret them prematurely.

Colaizzi's method, with its emphasis on thematic analysis, allowed me to clearly identify and categorize the key themes that emerge, providing a clear and systematic approach to understanding the lived experiences of the teachers in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implications

The findings underscored that the pedagogical dilemma of handling non-specialized students is a critical component that significantly affects both instructors and students in the academic field as the misalignment of teachers and subjects has been a frequently discussed problem and a concern for most teachers that needs to be addressed, and with that English teachers tasked to handle non-specialized subjects require targeted professional development in both content knowledge and pedagogical strategies for those subjects they are teaching. In addition, teacher education programs may need to include interdisciplinary coursework or modular training to equip non-specialized teachers to ensure that learners acquire the subject competencies based on the curriculum.

Furthermore, curriculum developers should consider flexible designs, instructional activities that align with the subject learning competency, that promote collaborative group tasks which encourage active participation of students, that provide integrated lesson plans or scaffolded support for teachers who are teaching outside their specialization, and that reduce cognitive activities.

These results aligned closely with the principles of constructivist Learning Theory by Jean Piaget (1964), which highlight the significance of collaborative and active engagement and the construction of knowledge through meaningful and hands-on experiences. Constructivist theory posits that learners actively construct their understanding of the world by interacting with their environment and assimilating added information into existing cognitive structures.

Another significant notion, as recounted by the participants, the mismatch of subject loads or handling non-specialized subjects has been both a challenging and rewarding experience. It was daunting to navigate unfamiliar content, concepts, and teaching methods outside of the area of expertise. It required extra effort in preparation, self-



learning, and seeking guidance from subject specialists to ensure accurate and engaging instruction. However, over time, English teachers have learned to embrace the learning journey alongside their students. By continuously refining teaching strategies, pursuing professional development, and utilizing available resources, they have gained confidence in handling various subjects. Though it is not always easy, this experience has strengthened their adaptability and resourcefulness, enabling educators to effectively support students regardless of the subject matter.

These findings aligned with Transformative Learning Theory by Mezirow (1978) wherein English educators understand how they change their perspectives and beliefs through critical reflection and new experiences upon handling subjects beyond their expertise, as they gain innovative approaches and strategies in delivering unfamiliar subject concepts. Likewise, this theory emphasizes the importance of adult learning and the capacity for profound personal transformation. Moreover, this learning theory is a complex process involving a change in the way a person views a problem and how expectations affect the way a person thinks, feels, and behaves (Christie et al., 2015). In this context, it can shed light on how English teachers can change their perspectives and pedagogical approaches while teaching outside of their area of competence.

Future Directions

The following are the recommendations for future explorations of the field's concentration and research designs of this study.

The Education sector should prioritize the integration of digital pedagogies into curriculum frameworks as it aids educators in teaching subjects particularly those where they have a little exposure and fundamental knowledge, and provide comprehensive training and support for teachers to effectively deliver subject matter outside of the area of competence, as well as instructional activities that are practical where students can apply in the real life scenarios, and learning opportunities that are highly student centered, helping learners to showcase their diverse abilities, potentials, and work with their peers.

School administrators play a crucial role. They should invest in professional development privileges for teachers, provide access to relevant technology resources, and make policies that promote innovative teaching practices to enhance the teaching-learning process, which could significantly impact both educators and learners. In addition, administrators should facilitate collaboration among teachers and encourage the sharing of best practices in handling non-specialized subjects.

Educators, particularly non-specialized teachers, should embrace and prioritize a learner-centered pedagogical approach, focusing on designing engaging and interactive learning experiences that promote critical thinking skills development. They should continuously seek opportunities for professional growth and stay updated on pedagogical strategies that enhance their subject expertise and instruction delivery. Additionally, teachers should collaborate with colleagues, especially specialized teachers, to enhance their instructional practices and learn from their manner of instruction.

Parents should be allowed to discuss educational strategies, ask helpful questions, and collaborate to improve their children's educational experience, as they play a significant role in their children's meaningful learning experiences.

Students should be urged to participate actively in their path of discovery and learning. They should develop literacy skills and critical thinking abilities through hands-on engagement and collaborative learning activities. Students should also be empowered to provide feedback on their learning experiences and contribute to the success of their academic performance, resulting in more effective and engaging learning experiences. Additionally, the study emphasized the significance of strengthening educational resources to strengthen student engagement and teachers' efficiency in private and public schools. The availability of updated learning materials anchored to learning interests and styles, and proficient and efficient faculty, played a pivotal role in shaping students' success in academic performance.

Future researchers should focus on determining and exploring innovative approaches for investing in educational resources, such as digital learning tools, instructional materials, professional development for educators, and extracurricular programs that enhance educators' pedagogical approaches that improve student engagement, particularly in non-specialized subjects. Private and public schools can create an environment that promotes student confidence, motivation, and academic success by ensuring access to high-quality educational resources.

Furthermore, I suggest that future researchers explore the following.

Action Research Design

Collaborative action research allows educators, especially non-specialist teachers and researchers, to co-develop treatments for recognized problems (e.g., limited content understanding) and verify their success in actual classrooms. This design stresses repeated cycles of planning, applying, and improving pedagogical strategies in teaching subjects outside of expertise.



Comparative Case Study Design

By using several case studies, comparing environments (e.g., public vs. private schools, urban vs. rural settings) reveals how institutional policies, resources, or training programs affect teachers' adaptation in non-specialized teaching and learning experiences for learners. Moreover, it suggests how crucial misalignment is in educational fields as it can have an impact on both educators and students.

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