

TEACHING BEYOND EXPERTISE: CHALLENGES OF SECONDARY ENGLISH PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN TEACHING OUT-OF-FIELD SUBJECT

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the focus is on the challenges faced by pre-service teachers specializing in secondary English when they contemplate teaching subjects beyond their expertise. After graduating, these teachers face the possibility of being assigned to teach courses outside their area of expertise due to the severe shortage of teachers in the Philippines, particularly in specialized fields. The objective of this study was to gather perspectives from pre-service English teachers regarding their encounters, difficulties, and strategies for handling the teaching of subjects unrelated to their field. This study employed a phenomenological research design to explore the experiences of English pre-service teachers teaching out-of-field subjects. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with six participants from Agusan del Sur State College of Agriculture and Technology. The collected data underwent manual coding, data reduction, and thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to the participants' experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Educators who are teaching subjects beyond their expertise often encounter substantial obstacles because of their limited knowledge and confidence. However, with adequate support, out-of-field teaching can lead to professional development and creativity. In order to teach subjects not within their expertise, teachers adjust by using familiar teaching techniques, relating the content to students' interests, and integrating interactive learning opportunities. Teachers often struggle when teaching subjects outside their expertise due to insufficient knowledge and resources, impacting student achievement. Overcoming language barriers and developing engaging lesson plans are additional challenges faced by out-of-field teachers. Teaching in a subject outside of one's expertise is difficult due to lack of knowledge, resources, and student involvement, but with effective strategies, support, and professional development, it can become a fulfilling experience for both educators and students. Successful out-of-field teaching requires a multi-faceted approach. Educators need ongoing professional development, strong support systems, and effective stress management techniques. Schools can enhance this process by providing resources and mentorship opportunities.

Keyword: Teaching beyond expertise, Pre-Service Teachers, Out-of-field subjects, phenomenological qualitative research, English

1. INTRODUCTION

"Out-of-field" teaching, the practice of assigning teachers to teach subjects outside of their area of competence has become a major problem in many educational systems across the globe. The quality of education children get is called into question by this practice, especially when inexperienced pre-service teachers are assigned to teach in such capacities. The difficulties secondary English pre-service teachers face when assigned to teach subjects outside of their areas of expertise are the main subject of this study.

Research from a number of different locations has brought attention to the difficulties involved in teaching outside of one's specialty. For example, a study conducted in the Philippines in 2021 by Co, Abella, and De Jesus examined the experiences of science teachers who were tasked with teaching subjects unrelated to their area of expertise. The researchers discovered that these educators struggled with course design, material delivery, and evaluation, which eventually affected the learning outcomes of the students. Similar difficulties have been reported in other nations, highlighting how persistent these problems are in many educational settings.

Another study conducted in Australia by Darling-Hammond, Wei, and Sykes's (2005) who looked at secondary teachers' experiences when they were given subjects to teach that weren't within their areas of expertise. The results showed that these teachers had a variety of challenges, such as low job satisfaction, insufficient pedagogical preparation, and a lack of subject expertise.

The difficulties of out-of-field teaching in the Philippines have been the subject of a small number of local studies, most of which have concentrated on in-service teachers. For example, a Davao del Sur study examined the experiences of senior high school instructors who were not in their specialty, emphasizing their challenges with emotional exhaustion, pedagogical modifications, and material knowledge. Nevertheless, little study has been done expressly to look at pre-service teachers' opinions in this situation, especially in the Mindanao region.

The distinctive experiences of pre-service teachers in this setting have received a little attention, despite the expanding corpus of research on out-of-field instruction. It is essential to comprehend the particular difficulties they face in order to create efficient support systems and enhance programs for preparing teachers. Furthermore, more research is necessary to fully understand how this approach affects student learning results.

Ensuring the quality of education requires addressing the difficulties pre-service teachers encounter when teaching outside of their expertise. Through an analysis of their experiences, this research hopes to aid in the creation of tactics to assist these inexperienced teachers, ultimately improving student learning and teacher retention.

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the experiences, challenges, coping strategies and insights of the English pre-service teachers of ASSCAT, TESC. Specifically, this study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of the Pre-service Secondary English Teachers who are teaching out of field subjects?
2. What are the challenges you have encountered in teaching out of field subjects?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of the participants to address the challenges?
4. What are the insights gained by the Secondary English Teachers who are teaching out of field subjects?

2. METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design which is suitable for exploring the essence and common meaning of a certain phenomenon to different individuals. This study focuses on Secondary English Pre-Service Teachers at Agusan del Sur State College of Agriculture and Technology, a well-respected institution with a reputation for academic excellence. The research involved extensive interviews and data collection on the school premises, aiming to understand the experiences and challenges faced by these teachers in developing lesson plans for non-major subjects. This study involved six Secondary English pre-service teachers during an internship program. The data was saturated at six participants, with an ideal number of 5-25. Convenience sampling was used to minimize biases and maintain objectivity. The researchers used pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities and ensure privacy and confidentiality. In addition, the researchers obtained permission from the Administrator of Agusan del Sur State College of Agriculture and Technology and the college president to conduct an in-depth interview. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and would not affect their job. The study used audio and video recorders to ensure the validity and reliability of the collected data. Moreover, the qualitative responses were documented using audio and video recorders, and the researcher conducted qualitative data analysis to identify, code, and categorize patterns. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify responses, themes, and categories. Thus, after the data collection period, the collected data were reviewed, synthesized, and documented to keep detailed notes. Lastly, to establish validity and reliability by examining four key components: credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. Credibility was established through

re-checking the information of English pre-service teachers through other sources, response checking, and debriefing. Confirmability was achieved through an audit trail, which allowed transparency in the research decisions and activities. In-depth interviews were conducted to confirm responses from English pre-service teachers, ensuring no biases. Transferability was established through a paper trail, ensuring the language used in interviews was understandable by the pre-service teachers. Confirmability was also established through a reflexive journal, which included all events and personal reflections during the investigation. Electronic and non-electronic records were kept throughout the study to cross-check data and write the final report. These measures ensured the validity and reliability of the study.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 This section presents the results of the 1st major research question; “What are your experiences in teaching out-of-field subjects?”. Four specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather information on the experiences of the research participants during their teaching out-of-field subjects.

Experiences in teaching out-of-field subjects. Educators face significant challenges when teaching subjects outside their expertise, mainly because of the need to bridge the knowledge gap. The steep learning curve requires teachers to devote significant time to mastering unfamiliar content, which can hamper their ability to craft engaging lesson plans and cultivate a supportive classroom environment. The lack of expertise may also erode a teacher's confidence and authority, making classroom management and the identification of effective teaching strategies more challenging. Nevertheless, despite these barriers, teaching out-of-field can stimulate professional development by pushing educators to cultivate innovative teaching methods and expand their knowledge base.

Early career teachers, who may feel pressured to take any available job, often feel compelled to teach subjects outside their expertise. These teachers face the difficult task of learning new content and teaching methods, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and stress. Teaching subjects they are not specialized in can impact students negatively, leading to less effective teaching and decreased student engagement. However, with the right support, like professional development and mentorship, teaching outside one's field can enhance educators' skills and perspectives, ultimately contributing to their professional growth.

According to Du Plessis (2019), a teacher's confidence is also damaged by a lack of material expertise, which makes it difficult for them to assert authority and run the classroom well. Furthermore, it might be difficult for teachers outside of their field to identify appropriate teaching strategies because what works in one subject may not work in another (Kim et al., 2018). Even with these difficulties, instructing outside of one's expertise can present a chance for professional development. It forces educators to grow professionally, expand their knowledge base, and create cutting-edge lesson plans that work for kids (Du Plessis, 2019; Caldis & Kleeman, 2019). Therefore, even though it can be challenging, out-of-field teaching can spur innovation and progress in the classroom when given the right resources and a dedication to professional development.

Ways Used in Adapting Teaching Strategies to Effectively Deliver Content in Subjects outside the Field of Expertise. Modifying teaching approaches to effectively present material in subjects beyond one's area of expertise involves utilizing established teaching methods, linking material to students' interests, and integrating interactive learning experiences. Proficient educators adjust their techniques to suit the specific requirements of each subject and the varying needs of their students. Utilizing tools like concept mapping and drawing on existing teaching knowledge can help bridge the knowledge gap in the content. Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) framework highlights the significance of grasping the material and how to teach it effectively, enabling teachers to adjust their approaches to enrich student comprehension.

Engaging students by connecting new material to their interests, such as popular culture, sports, or music, can be a highly effective strategy for creating a more immersive learning environment. This method utilizes transfer learning, where knowledge from familiar areas is applied to new concepts, ultimately enhancing motivation and understanding. Furthermore, integrating enjoyable and interactive activities like games, simulations, and experiments has the potential to turn ordinary lessons into exciting educational experiences. These activities address different learning preferences and promote the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. While a strong understanding of content is important, it is equally crucial for teachers from other fields to possess a solid grasp of pedagogical techniques to ensure effective learning and student engagement.

This improves communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities in addition to making learning pleasurable. In contrast to students in conventional lecture-based classrooms, Sailes, Riegle-Crumb, and McGough (2000) discovered that students who took part in activity-based scientific lectures reported higher levels of motivation and involvement. According to Prensky (2001), digital games with components like difficulty, storytelling, and instant feedback can be very effective teaching tools since they greatly inspire students to learn. The significance of intrinsic motivation in language acquisition is emphasized by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), who point out that stimulating activities can promote a good attitude toward learning and provide better results.

Teachers can turn boring courses into dynamic learning experiences by introducing interesting and enjoyable activities. This will make students active participants in their education and encourage a love of exploration and discovery.

3.2 This section presents the results to the 2nd major research question; “What are the challenges encountered by the participants in teaching out-of-field subjects?”. Four specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather information on the experiences of the research participants during their teaching out-of-field subject

Challenges Encountered in Teaching Educators face many difficulties when teaching subjects outside their field due to the lack of specific knowledge and suitable teaching materials. It can be challenging for teachers to explain complex concepts and design assessments that meet curriculum standards, leading to frustration and impeding student learning. Studies show a link between lower student achievement and teaching subjects outside one's field, especially in subjects like mathematics that require in-depth knowledge. Strategies such as offering high-quality instructional resources and continuous professional development can help alleviate these challenges. Successful teaching in out-of-field subjects necessitates careful selection and use of teaching resources to bridge gaps in knowledge and establish a conducive learning environment.

Out-of-field teachers face a significant obstacle in language proficiency, as effective communication is crucial for classroom success. If they are not familiar with subject-specific terminology, it can lead to misunderstandings and hinder student engagement. Breaking down intricate concepts can be difficult for teachers, limiting student participation and critical thinking. Research underlines the importance of subject-specific language skills for effective teaching, emphasizing the need for out-of-field educators to overcome linguistic barriers. By addressing these challenges through professional development and resource support, out-of-field teaching can become a valuable learning opportunity for educators and students, ultimately improving teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.

Out-of-field teachers can use a variety of tactics to address these problems, including demonstrating their genuine enthusiasm for the subject to pique students' interest, using interactive activities like games and debates to promote active participation, adding humor and relatable stories to make learning fun, and utilizing technology tools like simulations and educational apps to make learning more engaging. Studies support the significance of these strategies: Hammerness and Abrams (2010) emphasize the role of student engagement in supporting learning; Moseley and Skelton (2014) stress the significance of engaging teaching strategies and professional development; and Ingersoll (2012) emphasizes the negative impact of out-of-field teaching on student achievement and the need to address student attention.

Teachers can establish engaging learning environments that promote student attention and academic achievement by putting these strategies into practice and making a commitment to ongoing development.

Specific Challenges Encountered While Preparing Lesson Plans for Out-of-field Subjects. Developing lesson plans for subjects outside of one's expertise can be quite challenging, especially when it comes to creating interesting and interactive lessons. Teachers may struggle with a lack of in-depth knowledge in the specific subject, which makes it difficult for them to fully understand and effectively teach complex material. As a result, they face challenges in designing engaging and successful lessons. This lack of familiarity can lead to uncertainty in teaching approaches and methods, impacting students' learning and participation. Studies emphasize the need for collaboration and professional growth to address the challenges of teaching outside of one's field. McFarland and Kosanovich (2010) discuss effective techniques and supportive systems that can help educators overcome these hurdles and improve student engagement and academic performance, even in unfamiliar subjects.

Teachers face significant challenges when preparing lessons in subjects outside their expertise due to language barriers. Understanding the specific terminology and communication styles of a new field can be overwhelming, potentially leading to misunderstandings and difficulties in conveying information. Proficiency in subject-specific language is essential for effective lesson planning and student comprehension. Research by Moje (2008) and Shanahan (2010) emphasizes the importance of teachers being well-versed in the academic language of the subjects they teach. Frameworks such as Yoon and Krajcik's (2012) integration of language education into content-based lessons can address these linguistic challenges and improve the design of lessons and student learning. By overcoming language barriers and utilizing available resources, teachers can develop more effective and engaging lessons even in subjects beyond their expertise.

Ingersoll (2012) emphasizes the necessity for strong support structures while highlighting the pervasive problem of out-of-field teaching and its effect on student results. Hobbs and Törner (2017) highlight the challenges faced by educators who switch to new disciplines in the middle of their careers and promote cooperation and professional growth. Evidence of the close relationship between teacher content knowledge and student accomplishment is presented by Liu and Xu (2016), which emphasizes the value of supporting educators in jobs outside of their profession. Teachers may create and present more interesting lessons, even in subjects they are not familiar with, by tackling these obstacles and making the most of the resources that are available to them.

3.3 This section presents the results of the 3rd major research question; "What are the coping mechanisms of the participants to address the challenges?". Four specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather information on the experiences of the research participants during their teaching out-of-field subject

Coping Mechanism to Address the Challenges. Educators may find emotional support, resilience, and a sense of purpose by turning to their religious faith when they encounter challenges in teaching subjects outside their expertise. Faith can provide strength, endurance, and a positive outlook, while practices such as prayer and meditation can help in managing stress and anxiety. It's important to acknowledge that this individualized approach varies across cultures and religions and should respect diverse personal beliefs in the classroom. Research has shown that religious beliefs can help educators manage work-related stress and improve their overall well-being and resilience. However, not all educators find comfort in faith, and more research is necessary to fully comprehend its impact on teachers' well-being in different contexts.

Engaging in professional development and seeking advice from colleagues are proactive approaches that assist teachers in addressing the challenges of teaching subjects outside their expertise. Continuous support and valuable discussions on lesson plans and classroom management techniques are offered through formal mentorship programs and peer collaboration. Participation in workshops specific to the subject area offers essential insights and techniques for improving teaching effectiveness. These strategies encourage teacher growth, enhance student outcomes, and cultivate a supportive educational community. Research emphasizes the significant impact of mentorship and professional development on boosting teachers' confidence and retention rates, especially for those teaching beyond their areas of expertise. Collaborative efforts and ongoing professional development empower educators to effectively manage the hurdles of teaching out-of-field subjects.

Furthermore, by highlighting individual development and effort, self-encouragement raises self-efficacy and increases confidence in one's ability to grasp the material. Research backs up these advantages: Moos and Skaalvik (2011) discovered a link between teacher resilience and self-efficacy, and that self-encouragement fosters a growth attitude. Yoon and Liu (2013) demonstrated that self-compassion, nurtured by self-encouragement, boosts self-efficacy and resilience. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) noted that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy produce more positive learning environments. Using self-encouragement as a coping strategy gives out-of-field teachers more self-assurance and well-being as they handle the difficulties of teaching foreign subjects, which makes for a happier and more fruitful learning environment.

Specific Strategies Used to Manage and Reduce Stress When Facing Challenges. Getting guidance is an effective approach for dealing with stress, as it gives access to outside resources and various viewpoints. Advisors can present fresh strategies and techniques to deal with stressors, while sharing burdens for emotional support can reduce feelings of isolation and increase confidence in facing challenges. Studies back up the advantages of seeking advice: Bodie (2010) emphasizes the value of social support in stress management, Liu and ShROUT (2016) discover that seeking advice improves emotional well-being, and Park, Edmondson, and Lindquist (2013) show its positive effects on employee well-being and performance. This approach provides individuals with the necessary tools to overcome difficulties and enhance overall well-being.

Utilizing self-regulation is an effective strategy for dealing with stress. Cognitive reframing, mindfulness, and meditation are helpful techniques for reducing stress by promoting rational thinking and emotional management. The practice of deep breathing, efficient time management, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle also significantly aid in reducing stress. Studies have shown the benefits of these techniques: O'Reilly and Moylan (2011) found that mindfulness enhances academic performance and reduces stress, Hofmann and Petrie (2013) emphasized its role in decreasing emotional reactivity, and Karlsson and Bäckryd (2016) demonstrated the mental health advantages of physical activity. By intentionally employing these self-regulation methods, individuals can improve their resilience and handle stressful situations with greater clarity and control.

These advantages are supported by research: Kuoppala and Linnala (2017) shows that goal-setting during organizational change helps employees manage stress and maintain motivation; Locke and Latham (2006) emphasize that specific and challenging goals enhance motivation and performance; Park and Choi (2013) find that challenging goals can reduce stress when coupled with feelings of self-efficacy and perceived control. Through the application of these tactics and insights, individuals can effectively manage stress, increase motivation, and achieve desired objectives through goal planning.

3.4 This section presents the results of the 4th major research question; “What are the insights gained by the Secondary English Teachers who are teaching out-of-field subjects?”. Four specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather information on the experiences of the research participants during their teaching out-of-field subject

Insights Gained in Teaching Out-of-Field Subjects. Teaching in unfamiliar territory can be a transformative experience for teachers, significantly propelling their careers forward. Venturing into a different subject area necessitates educators to revisit and improve their basic teaching methods, strengthening instructional design and classroom management capabilities across all disciplines. Developing a new curriculum often enhances teachers' grasp of the subject matter, equipping them to effectively convey fundamental concepts. This challenge not only boosts a teacher's confidence in their ability to learn and adapt but also encourages a more empathetic approach towards students' challenges, as evidenced by research from Hobson and Scherff (2014) and Moeller and Ingersoll (2010)

Teaching outside one's usual field can bring unexpected advantages, despite the initial challenges of stress and feelings of inadequacy. It often encourages teachers to be more creative, enhancing their skills in research and lesson planning. This process commonly results in intellectual stimulation and personal growth, which improve the teacher's understanding of the learning experience. Research by Moeller and Roebuck (2014) and Ingersoll and Perlmutter (2017) highlights the significance of creativity, adaptability, and support systems for educators handling new subjects. By having a strong support system and being open to learning, teachers can overcome these obstacles and discover valuable professional and personal growth opportunities.

Having a flexible mindset is essential for educators who are exploring new subjects beyond their expertise. This involves being willing to learn new content, adjusting lesson plans, and trying out different teaching methods. Such adaptability not only expands a teacher's knowledge but also improves problem-solving abilities and teaching techniques. Studies by Mohatt and Pianta (2010) and Darling-Hammond (2000) emphasize the importance of flexibility in the field of education. Teachers who embrace these challenges gain valuable experience and opportunities for professional development, ultimately becoming more effective and adaptable instructors who can better support their students' learning journeys.

Impact of Teaching Out-of-field Subjects to Teaching Practices and Methodologies. When educators teach subjects that they are not formally trained in, it can have a significant impact on their teaching practices and methodologies. While this can lead to collaboration with subject-matter experts and promote reflective practice, it can also bring about challenges such as a shortage of content, reduced confidence, and a reliance on memorization. The impact of teaching outside one's area of expertise can differ depending on the subject matter, the teacher's previous experience, and the availability of support systems. According to research by Ingersoll (2012) and Moeller and Gutierrez (2016), there is an emphasis on the necessity of structured support programs to address these challenges and ensure effective learning environments.

The practice promotes educators to boost their ingenuity and flexibility, often resulting in the creation of original teaching techniques and a wider range of teaching approaches. By prioritizing student-centered learning and utilizing diverse resources, educators can enhance their teaching skills despite feeling initially inadequate due to unfamiliar subject matter. Research emphasizes the significance of mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and high-quality teaching materials in addressing these difficulties. Hobbs (2013) and Moeller and Poundstone's (2014) studies underscore the importance of targeted support to nurture both teacher confidence and student success in teaching scenarios outside their field.

When teachers need to instruct unfamiliar subjects, they must adjust their usual methods and approaches, focusing more on teaching strategies than on specific content knowledge. This change can result in creative lesson plans and a more adaptable teaching style, but it can also lead to difficulties such as reduced confidence in addressing student questions. Studies confirm this trend, suggesting that while teachers outside their field can bring in new teaching methods, they may find it challenging to engage in subject-specific discussions, potentially affecting their effectiveness. However, with the right support and adjustments to their teaching approach, teaching outside one's field can offer valuable opportunities for professional growth, ultimately leading to high-quality instruction and improved student performance.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, there are several difficulties that teachers have when teaching outside of their area of expertise, such as a lack of subject knowledge, finding suitable teaching resources, being unfamiliar with specialized terminology, and keeping students engaged. Nonetheless, studies suggest that these challenges can be effectively overcome. Engaging with students, utilizing a variety of resources, collaborating with cooperating teachers, and using flexible teaching techniques are all examples of effective ways. Out-of-field teaching may be a fulfilling experience for educators and learners alike, encouraging creativity and advancement in the classroom with the right assistance and professional development.

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