TEACHING BEYOND THE COMFORT ZONE: EXPERIENCES OF OUT-OF-FIELD TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The educational system currently faces multiple challenges, including those related to teacher performance. Declining learner achievement and reduced educational quality are frequently linked to the effectiveness of teaching. This study aims to investigate specific teacher-related challenges faced by the Department of Education over recent decades. A shortage of qualified teachers in major areas, the practice of hiring teachers based on immediate subject needs, contributed to the assignment of educators to out-of-field subjects. A validated survey questionnaire was used to gather data from the six informants, who were purposively selected from public secondary schools within the Municipality of Monkayo. Findings revealed that the informants experienced both negative and positive reactions when informed that they would teach out-of-field subjects. The teacher faced various challenges, including a lack of references, basic knowledge of the topic, content mastery, terminology, strategies for dealing with classroom behavior, and students' abilities. Additionally, it has affected the teachers' professional capacity and confidence in teaching.

Keyword: " *educational administration, out-of-field subject, experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights, phenomenological research design"*

1. THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND TITLE

Out-of-field teaching is a phenomenon in which teachers are assigned to teach subjects that are not related to their qualifications and expertise. The prevalence of this practice is increasing globally due to the teacher shortage, deployment challenges, and class scheduling conflicts, as documented by Hobbs (2013). Educators must consistently adapt instructional methods and curriculum content to address the evolving demands of the educational system. As a result, educators may be assigned to teach a subject in which they did not major or obtain formal instruction during their pre-service schooling.

A study conducted by Sharplin (2014) in Western Australia revealed that mis-assigned teachers were more likely to leave their appointments than role and phase-congruent participants and more likely to express dissatisfaction with the quality of work-life. Sharplin concluded that out-of-field teaching emerged as an important issue that can impact teachers' sense of efficacy and teacher attrition.

Moreover, a study by Roxas (2022) conducted at San Celestino and San Isidro Integrated National High Schools in Lipa, Batangas, explored the lived experiences of teachers assigned to teach out-of-field subjects. The study revealed that teachers who taught outside their specialization had difficulties on learning the subjects. Roxas concluded that teachers should be placed in proper specialized subjects, and the importance of administrative support and professional development, such as training, seminars, and workshops, in empowering teachers with the appropriate knowledge and confidence necessary to teach non-major courses.

At Union National High School, approximately 70.58% of the teaching staff are currently assigned to teach subjects outside their area of expertise. This expanding tendency of out-of-field teaching is primarily due to a shortage of subject-specialized teachers, deployment challenges, and class scheduling conflicts. To ensure that all

subjects are taught, they often placed teachers in challenging situations where they must deliver classes despite lacking proper content training.

Despite these constraints, many teachers at Union National High School, Union National High School Mt. Diwata, and Ulip National High School who will participate in the study show resilience and a commitment to fulfilling their duties by seeking ways to adapt, such as engaging in self-study, collaborating with peers, and attending short-term trainings. However, Baras and Gillo (2020) found that out-of-field teaching can result in low teaching confidence, decreased motivation, and increased professional stress. In the context of Union National High School and two other participating schools, it is crucial to comprehend teachers' actual experience, the challenges they encountered while teaching the subject, the coping mechanisms they employ to ease the different challenges, and insights that they can share with future teachers who will teach subjects out of their expertise.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research investigated the experiences of teachers at Union National High School-Mt. Diwata Annex and Upper Ulip National High School. These teachers had assignments to teach subjects outside their expertise. The study explores the challenges these teachers faced, the solutions they found, and the advice they had for future teachers in similar situations. Since the faculty teaches subjects that are not their main focus, this research highlighted how these assignments affect teaching effectiveness, teachers' morale, and professional growth.

1.2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A clear and consistent definition of out-of-field teaching is important for successful research, policy, and educational practice. Hobbs et al. (2022) state that a lack of understanding of what out-of-field teaching is makes it difficult to assess its scope and effect on the teacher. The research highlights the importance of defining the concept clearly to guide systematic responses and improve teacher hiring and support. Out-of-field teaching continues to be a significant issue that impacts educational quality and teacher effectiveness. Du Plessis (2017) notes that helping educational leaders understand the experiences of out-of-field teachers is vital for addressing the difficulties of teachers and ensuring quality education. If a school leader fails to understand out-of-field teaching, they may overlook professional setbacks and teaching gaps that teachers encounter. Therefore, acknowledging and addressing the reality of out-of-field teaching is necessary for promoting good teaching practices and fostering student success.

Professional development and collaborative learning communities help teachers improve content knowledge and teaching skills Darling-Hammond & Richardson, (2009). Teachers use self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and online resources. Ongoing professional development aids adjustment (Darling-Hammond, 2000), and interdisciplinary approaches foster engagement Drake & Burns (2004).

Non-major subjects affect teacher performance and well-being but remain unresolved. Raymundo (2021) noted challenges like insufficient knowledge, poor preparation, and low confidence, stressing the need for support through development, mentoring, and thoughtful assignments.

Perez found teachers outside their major feel uncomfortable, less effective, and spend more time preparing. They rely on peer mentoring and self-study, showing a need for better staffing strategies and specific training.

Teaching outside one's major can be emotionally taxing, but success boosts confidence and growth Tschannen-Moran et al., (2001). Balancing major and non-major subjects may cause burnout Maslach et al., (2001), though some see it as skill-building Beijaard et al.,(2004).

Institutional support shapes teacher experiences. Schools offering resources, development, and community support create positive environments Fullan (2007). Policy changes are needed to address challenges and promote growth Ingersoll (2001).

Alcontin and Sinang (2022) studied non-major Social Studies teachers using inquiry-based, collaborative, and reflective methods. Their findings align with constructivist and student-centered approaches Levstik & Barton, (2011); Brooks, (2011), supporting civic and critical thinking skills (NCSS, 2013).

Teaching strategies for non-major students in arts and humanities gained attention due to general education. Enz (2013) reviewed music education for non-majors, highlighting active learning like group performances and appreciation discussions. Abril (2006) emphasized student-centered teaching, and Juchniewicz (2010) stressed engagement and relevance.

Enz (2013) noted challenges in balancing accessibility and depth, and evaluating outcomes, linking to broader discussions on cultural understanding Fung (2017). Training boosts confidence in non-major subjects (Avalos, 2011), and mentoring improves teacher experience and student results Ingersoll & Strong (2011).

Motivated teachers can teach effectively with support, but unprepared ones may face burnout and dissatisfaction Goe et al., (2008). Out-of-field teaching creates professional challenges. Du Plessis (2013) explored its impact on identity and effectiveness, stressing systemic support.

Out-of-field teaching leads to ongoing learning and development. Seshea (2017) showed high school teachers face steep learning curves with new topics and methods. These challenges can hurt confidence and instruction but also offer growth if support is available.

Teaching requires specific knowledge and engagement. When teaching outside their expertise, educators face challenges in preparedness, confidence, resources, and institutional support Reymundo (2021).

Teachers asked to teach outside their expertise face challenges affecting confidence, effectiveness, and job satisfaction Benevene et al.,(2019). Lack of experience leads to trouble with lesson planning, teaching methods, and assessment (2005).

They often rely on textbooks or pre-made materials, limiting lesson customization. Extra prep time causes stress and burnout, especially with multiple non-major topics Smith & Ingersoll (2004).

Uncertainty in unfamiliar subjects leads to hesitation, poor classroom management, and difficulty answering questions, resulting in dissatisfaction. Strong subject understanding and high self-efficacy improve teaching and persistence Tschannen et.al., (2001).

Non-major teachers often lack training and rely on self-study and peer collaboration Avalos (2011). Support from school officials and colleagues is often minimal, with focus on major courses Ingersoll & Strong (2011).

Institutional support is essential. Professional development improves skills and knowledge Desimone (2009), but availability and quality vary, affecting readiness and confidence Darling-Hammond et al., (2017).

Unfamiliarity with objectives and grading standards causes struggles in evaluating performance and creating fair assessments Goe, Bell, & Little, (2008). Continuous development and customized training boost confidence and ability Borko, (2004).

Technology helps address challenges with online resources, software, and collaboration platforms Ertmer et al., (2010).

Out-of-field teaching is global, especially in math. Goos and Guerin (2021) found differences in confidence, delivery, and engagement among math teachers. Professional learning helps, but ongoing support is needed.

Teacher identity matters in math education. Ní Ríordáin et al. (2022) found insecurity and fear of exposure shape understanding, showing emotional challenges and the need for support and development.

Paolucci, Ní Ríordáin, and O'Dwyer (2021) evaluated Ireland's program for out-of-field math teachers. It improved knowledge and confidence, but long-term change needs continued support.

Out-of-field math teaching affects low-income schools. Vale et al. (2021) found lack of confidence in content knowledge hurts effectiveness, showing need for targeted development and structural support.

Out-of-field teaching causes professional and emotional stress. Bugwak (2021) found challenges with material knowledge, confidence, and identity, stressing the need for support and development.

David (2024) studied non-Social Studies majors teaching Araling Panlipunan. Challenges included limited expertise, contextualizing content, and low confidence. Coping methods were self-learning, collaboration, and tech use.

Riboroso (n.d.) studied Math teachers teaching non-math subjects. Problems included lack of mastery, low confidence, and poor pedagogy. Solutions like self-study and workshops helped but didn't fix curriculum issues.

Berry (2010) noted teachers spend more time preparing for non-major classes to gather relevant information.

Professional development is important for giving teachers the skills and knowledge they need to teach non-major courses. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) stress the value of customized professional development programs that focus on both subject knowledge and teaching skills. Teachers often take part in workshops, online courses, and peer collaboration to strengthen their understanding of non-major areas.

Moreover, working with colleagues is a common coping strategy. Vangrieken et al. (2015) found that collaboration among teachers results in better teaching methods and sharing of resources. Teachers often form support groups to exchange lesson plans, resources, and effective teaching strategies for non-major courses. They seek help from peers who specialize in the subjects they teach. Through collaborative lesson planning, sharing resources, and co-teaching, they gain insights and confidence (Grossman et al., (2005).

Koehler and Mishra (2009) noted that using technology in instruction enhances teachers' ability to communicate effectively. Teachers can enrich their classes with interactive tools, videos, simulations, and online platforms Darling-Hammond (2000). They can use sites like Khan Academy, Coursera, and YouTube lessons to fill knowledge gaps and improve their teaching.

To overcome their lack of subject knowledge, teachers often engage in self-study. They use textbooks, online tutorials, webinars, and open educational materials to better understand the subject (Avalos, 2011). Some teachers

also enroll in certification programs or professional development courses to gain more formal expertise. They apply their new experience to make classes more relevant and engaging. By connecting different subjects, they provide students with meaningful learning experiences Drake & Burns, 2004). Many teachers seek guidance from experienced educators or academic mentors. Mentorship provides emotional support, practical teaching skills, and a methodical way to approach non-major subjects Ingersoll & Strong (2011).

Additionally, teachers who view challenges as opportunities for growth find it easier to teach subjects outside their major. Adopting a growth mindset helps teachers stay engaged and open to learning new material Dweck, (2006).

Sometimes, teachers shift their focus from direct instruction to student-led learning strategies. By encouraging group discussions, research projects, and student presentations, they facilitate learning rather than act as the sole source of information Goe et al., (2008). Many teachers use pre-made lesson plans, worksheets, and assessments from educational publishers, government websites, or online communities Smith & Ingersoll (2004).

Yumang (2021) explores the mixed feelings of senior high school teachers assigned to teach non-specialized subjects outside their expertise. His research highlights both the challenges and opportunities these teachers face. On one hand, educators feel inadequate, face longer preparation times, and struggle with content delivery. On the other hand, some see this as a chance for professional growth, adaptability, and skill expansion. These "bittersweet" experiences reflect the contrasting realities of out-of-field teaching in the Philippine educational system.

This finding matches earlier research focusing on the struggles of teaching subjects outside one's specialization. Baras and Gillo (2020) found that teachers often feel low confidence and stress when handling unfamiliar topics, leading them to rely on activity-based methods and peer support. Similarly, del Pilar and Militante (2020) noted that extensive reading and collaboration were common strategies for addressing topic shortages. Together, these studies highlight the need for organized support systems, like focused professional development, mentorship, and strategic teacher assignment, to ensure effectiveness and learning outcomes in non-specialized topic teaching.

A common theme in the literature is the struggle caused by insufficient subject knowledge. Teachers assigned to teach areas outside their major often express concerns about their expertise and confidence in delivering content Smith, (2020). This lack of experience can lead to extra preparation time and stress, affecting the quality of instruction. Teaching non-major courses often requires significant adjustments. Teachers must modify their teaching strategies for unfamiliar subjects, which can be challenging Johnson (2022). Creating new instructional materials and assessments adds complexity to the process Lee et al., (2023).

Teaching machine learning (ML) to non-majors brings unique challenges because of the subject's interdisciplinary nature and the students' varied backgrounds. Sulmont et al. (2019) examined the teaching goals of instructors working with non-majors in machine learning and identified the cognitive and curricular issues they face. Their research, which categorized instructors' learning objectives, showed that there is no agreement on what defines basic ML knowledge for non-specialist learners; goals can range from conceptual understanding to practical application.

One important insight from the study is the challenge of balancing technical detail with accessibility. Instructors often struggle to determine the level of math or programming knowledge to assume, especially when designing courses for students in business, biology, and social sciences. This aligns with other findings, such as Dorn (2018), emphasizing the need to contextualize ML knowledge to make it relevant and engaging for non-technical students.

Sulmont et al. (2019) discovered significant differences among instructors in their emphasis on critical thinking about ML's societal impact versus its technical implementation. This reflects a broader trend in computing education that incorporates ethical considerations and real-world implications into the curriculum (Fiesler et al., 2020).

Professional development is essential for equipping teachers with the skills needed to effectively teach non-major courses. Activities like workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning communities offer valuable opportunities for educators to enhance their content knowledge and teaching methods (aylor & Francis (2019).

Many teachers report that, despite challenges, teaching non-major subjects promotes professional growth by helping them build new skills, gain confidence, and become more adaptable educators Smith and Ingersoll (2004). Collaborative teaching, where educators create and deliver instruction together, has proven to be an effective strategy. This method allows teachers to share expertise, resources, and teaching strategies, easing the burden on individual educators Miller & Cohen (2021).

Building a supportive school environment is vital for teachers of non-major courses. School leaders play a crucial role in providing necessary resources, ongoing professional development, and collaboration opportunities Anderson & Johnson (2020). Teachers recognize the importance of actively learning new content and teaching

methods to thrive in non-major courses and often express renewed enthusiasm for lifelong learning Avalos,(2011). Collaborating with colleagues who have specialized knowledge is highly valued since it enables resource sharing, insights, and mentorship (Grossman et al., 2005).

Additionally, teachers find that teaching non-major topics pushes them to be more creative in their classes. They often draw from their experiences to make learning more engaging for students (Drake & Burns, 2004).
Teachers must stress the significance of receiving support from their schools, including training opportunities, access to resources, and mentorship programs, to help them adjust to their new teaching roles Ingersoll & Strong, (2011). They highlight that when they are not subject matter experts, they rely more on active learning techniques, such as student-led discussions and research projects Goe et al., (2008).

Out-of-field (OOF) teaching remains a significant concern, especially in STEM fields where teacher shortages are common. Nameng, Mushayikwa, and Radebe (2025) conducted a situational analysis of out-of-field science teachers in South Africa, highlighting the complexities surrounding the issue. Despite official qualifications, many teachers find themselves in unexpected roles, leading to uncertainty in instruction, professional identity, and content understanding. The study stresses the importance of context-sensitive policies and support mechanisms to address the real challenges out-of-field instructors face.

Out-of-field teaching is a global issue that disproportionately impacts early-career teachers. Wheeley, Klieve, Park, and Du Plessis (2023) studied preservice teachers' attitudes towards out-of-field teaching, revealing that many expect negative effects on their confidence and teaching effectiveness. The findings also indicate broader consequences for students and schools, including reduced subject mastery and significant learning gaps. These results underscore the necessity of preparing future educators for the realities of out-of-field tasks and equipping them with flexible strategies.

Out-of-field teaching, where educators are assigned subjects without official qualifications, presents significant challenges, particularly in remote areas. Sharplin (2014) reframed the issue by examining the experiences of rural teachers in Western Australia. Her research found that out-of-field assignments affect not only teaching quality but also teacher morale, professional identity, and retention. The findings stress the need for targeted support structures suited to rural settings where such assignments are often inevitable.

School leadership significantly influences teachers' experiences, especially in out-of-field teaching environments. Porsch and Hobbs (2024) explored principals' views on out-of-field assignments, revealing that leadership perceptions greatly impact the support given to these roles within schools. While many principals recognize the challenges teachers face, the study also pointed out misunderstandings and a lack of regular support systems. These findings highlight the need for aligning leadership strategies with the learning goals of out-of-field teachers.

2. METHODS

The study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological research design. Qualitative study, according to Creswell (2012) is an approach used to gain phenomenon within its natural setting. Using this method creates a different knowledge through a broader understanding of the complexity of human behavior and gathers precise data about people's beliefs. It seeks to get a comprehensive understanding of matter the human viewpoint was examined.

In addition, the phenomenological research approach was utilized in this research to explore the essence of the phenomenon and understand the lived experiences of the participants. It aims to fully comprehend participants' experiences, motivations, and the interpretation they make of a phenomenon. Phenomenology is the best approach used to deal with experiences Patton (2002). Phenomenological research is well suited for examining how teachers adjust to non-major teaching loads, as it aims to analyze participants shared experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights from teachers who teach non-major subjects.

An approach to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of teachers assigned to teach subjects outside their areas of expertise. The goal of a research methodology known as phenomenology is to investigate and characterize how people understand their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013) asserts that qualitative phenomenological research is well-suited for examining how teachers adjust to non-major teaching loads, as it aims to analyze participants' shared experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights from teachers who teach non-major subjects.

This phenomenological study was conducted in Monkayo East District, where eight secondary schools are located. This includes Union National High School and Union National High School-Mt. Diwata Annex, and Upper Ulip National High School. This study will have six participants, two teacher participants per school.
Monkayo East District, approximately 7 kilometers from Población, Monkayo, Davao de Oro, where Union National High School, the mother school, is located in the center of the barangay. About 1.5 kilometers away, an

annex of Union National High School, Mt. Diwata High School, is situated. Its surrounding barangays include Upper Ulip, 2.2 kilometers to the east, where Upper Ulip National High School is located.

Barangay Union, and Upper Ulip are members of the Mandaya Tribe, an indigenous group whose primary source of income is farming, with main crops including vegetables, rice, bananas, coconuts, rubber plants, and fruit trees.

However, due to numerous voluntary relocations and migrations of people to the National Housing Authority caused by the devastating effects of Bagyong Pablo in 2012, a community of diverse cultural groups has been created, living together with shared values and common aims.

Because of this calamity, the secondary school in Barangay Mt. Diwata moved to the lowland due to the significant danger that might arise in the future from mining, which has become a livelihood for many, as well as the broad- reaching impact of Typhoon Pablo, which has made Barangay Union a recipient of thousands of houses from the National Housing Authority. Nevertheless, the “Pillar of Hope” Mt. Diwata Annex has steadfastly continued its mission to instill hope in its learners alongside its 23 junior and senior high school teachers.

Union National High School is known as "The Cradle of Human Virtues." Its mission is to uphold timeless Filipino values that represent traditional Filipino cultures, which are unwittingly vanishing in the present day due to Western influence through social media and technology. Since the school provides equal access opportunities that complement DepEd's mission, vision, and goals for junior and senior high school, all students can benefit from this. Currently, about 477 students and twenty-nine (29) staff members, including teaching, non-teaching, and contract staff, attend Union National High School. The school has experienced rapid growth while maintaining its commitment to volunteerism and fostering strong stakeholder relationships.

Ulip National High School, known as "The Home of Holistic Learners," located in Barangay Upper Ulip, Monkayo, Davao de Oro, has long been a topic of conversation among surrounding schools, as it has become a National Qualifier and even won awards in the field of journalism, with 21 dedicated teachers- 5 males and 16 females- who have fought every battle to provide the very best for their learners.

In qualitative research, particularly in phenomenological studies, the researcher played a central role in designing, interviewing, transcribing, thematizing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. In particular, the researcher’s task was to assess the thoughts and feelings of the participants by Fink’s (2000).

Since the data analysis used in this study is thematic analysis, the researcher will organize the ideas, phrases, or statements into core themes. The researcher will then act as a data collector during the in-depth interview. The researcher prefers to probe participants while gathering data and then will seek to build a picture using ideas and theories from a wide variety of sources.

After the interview, the researcher transcribed the participants' answers. The transcribed data will then be analyzed. Its credibility, dependability, and transferability will then be verified. Furthermore, the qualitative data gathered enabled the researcher to conduct an in-depth study of the subject matter. According to Flink (2000), reflexivity is crucial in phenomenological research as it helps mitigate the researcher’s biases and ensures that the findings authentically represent the participants’ experiences.

In this study, the researcher strived to remain open and flexible, allowing the participants’ voices to shape the direction of the study while continuously reflecting on how their perspectives influenced their interactions and analysis. Moreover, the researcher is actively involved in analyzing the data through thematic coding and pattern recognition, in line with phenomenological methods. This process involved identifying common themes and insights across participants’ experiences with TEL implementation.

The researcher’s role is to interpret these themes in a way that brings clarity to the challenges and coping mechanisms of teachers, ensuring that the findings are relevant to improving school leadership practices and enhancing teacher and student performance in schools.

Purposive sampling, in which individuals were purposefully chosen based on their knowledge, experiences, and relevance to the research topic, was used to select participants from the three secondary schools of Monkayo East District. The selection of participants was based on the inclusion criteria set by the researcher: having taught non-major subjects for at least three years and being willing to share their personal experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights. The exclusion criteria include individuals who are not currently teaching non-major subjects and those who are not teaching in junior high schools. By following these criteria, the study ensured that the participants were well-suited to provide valuable insights into the experiences of teachers who teach non-major subjects.

The researcher solicited certification from the ethics research committee, which allowed the researcher to conduct the study. After which, an endorsement letter from the dean of the graduates’ school of Assumption College of Nabunturan, together with the letter of intent to conduct the study, was submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) for acknowledgment and approval. Upon obtaining permission from the superintendent, the

researcher requested permission from the principals of the three public secondary schools in the Monkayo East district.

The researcher took extra effort to explain the purpose of the study to ensure that the teacher participants were responsible in answering each item. The researcher personally conducted the gathering of the data through IDI.
All responses of the participants were transcribed and thematized. The consolidated data were subjected to thematic analysis. All the important files were kept safe and secure with utmost confidentiality.

The study employed thematic analysis to examine the data, which were structured around three key action processes: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions and verifying findings. Data reduction involves coding, condensing codes, and interpreting the data into figures and tables (Clark, 2018). This stage enables the filtering out of irrelevant information and focusing on the most significant data points.

Following the compilation of interview notes, audio recordings, and other supporting materials, the data underwent a comprehensive analysis and validation process to yield meaningful insights (Creswell, 2016). During face-to-face interviews, the researcher adopted a systematic approach to data management. This involved reading, memorizing, describing, interpreting, representing, and visualizing the data.

For data management, the researcher organized and store files from various sources, including interviews, observations, and supporting materials such as online articles and books.

In the reading and memorizing stage, the researcher will read through the transcribed data, annotate it with margin notes, and develop initial codes. Describing the data involved detailing the case and its context. In interpreting the data, the researcher used direct interpretation and form naturalistic generalizations.

Finally, the researcher presented the findings in a narrative format, supplemented by tables and visual aids, for representation and visualization. Data coding refers to the process of categorizing and analyzing data to identify key themes and explanations. This was the initial stage of data analysis, designed to identify key trends. Data coding also involved reducing the data and organizing it into meaningful categories based on the research questions. By assigning labels to relevant sections of the text, the researcher connected the data to the key issues of the study (Creswell, 2016).

After re-reading and thoroughly understanding the transcripts, the researcher will organize the data systematically by generating codes. This step involved identifying core ideas and major themes relevant to the study's objectives. The core ideas and themes were grouped based on similarities with other themes derived from the experiences, perspectives, coping mechanisms, and insights of teachers who were teaching non-major subjects.

Moreover, thematic analysis was employed to ensure that the collected data were analyzed thoroughly. Themes were identified and grouped to reveal the central aspects of the study, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the findings. Given that some of the data may be delivered in vernacular, the researcher carefully translated the transcripts, paying close attention to the nuances of the language in order to extract meaningful themes.

After defining and reviewing the themes, the researcher proceeded with concluding and verifying the findings as part of the data analysis process. This crucial step ensured that the analysis was validated and that the findings contributed valuable information for the results and discussions of the study.

In this study, the researcher adopts various strategies to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the research process. As outlined by Shenton (2004) in *Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research Projects*, the rigor of a qualitative study was validated through four key criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility is defined as the researcher's confidence in the truth and validity of the study's findings. It aligned with the research objective of selecting the most appropriate methods to address specific research questions (Pilot & Beck, 2012). To enhance credibility, the study incorporated strategies such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, iterative questioning, and member checking. Interactive questioning and member checking are specifically utilized to ensure that the data were accurate and reflects the participants' actual experiences. Iterative questioning helped the researcher probe deeper, eliciting comprehensive and accurate responses from participants.

This study integrated "overlapping methods" and in-depth methodological descriptions, ensuring that the research can be replicated by other scholars, allowing for the development of a comprehensive understanding of the findings. To enhance dependability, the researcher references other related studies from both global and national contexts, situating the study within a broader framework. Peer examination also played a role in ensuring dependability, as experts assisted in the thorough analysis of the data collected, and the study underwent examination during the outline and final defenses.

Confirmability concerns the extent to which the findings of the study were unbiased and derived directly from the data rather than the researcher's preconceptions. It ensured that the research process remains impartial and that the findings accurately reflected participants' experiences, rather than the researcher's beliefs. In this study, all

interviews were transcribed and translated with meticulous attention to detail, ensuring that the data accurately reflected the voices of the participants, rather than the researcher's personal biases.

The researcher ensured that sufficient contextual information was provided, enabling readers to determine the relevance of the findings to their own situations. Detailed descriptions of the study's techniques, settings, and phenomena ensured that the findings can be compared to similar environments or contexts, facilitating the transfer of knowledge. The researcher also maintained comprehensive records, including transcripts and data, which can be referenced by other researchers for future studies.

This study included a comprehensive orientation process for participants prior to their involvement in interviews, ensuring that procedures are fair, impartial, and equitable for all involved the policies of the Assumption College of Nabunturan Ethics Committee. All nine elements of ethical research were meticulously observed to ensure that participants were safe from all forms of harm throughout the study.

The findings of this study were valuable for Department of Education (DepEd) officials and policymakers in crafting context-sensitive policies and support mechanisms that target school leaders, particularly those in under-resourced or multigrade settings. These findings can enhance leadership capacity in technology integration, address barriers to digital access, and inform the development of scalable, inclusive professional development programs. Moreover, the voices and lived experiences of school heads were acknowledged, providing them with a platform to be heard and validated within the broader narrative of bridging the digital divide in basic education.

To ensure voluntary and informed participation, the researcher obtains informed consent in a face-to-face setting prior to the commencement of data collection. Participants were fully briefed on the study's goals, procedures, and ethical safeguards. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals may refuse or withdraw at any time without consequence. The researcher ensured that participants were legally capable of providing consent and are given adequate time to understand and evaluate the information. Health and safety protocols were strictly observed throughout the interaction.

Although minimal, potential risks such as emotional discomfort in recalling personal challenges were anticipated. However, the benefits far outweigh these risks, as participants gained opportunities to reflect on their leadership practices and learn from the shared experiences of their peers. In-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted at safe and conducive venues, with utmost respect for participants' schedules, mostly on weekends. Interview questions were carefully crafted to avoid offense or discomfort, and participants may opt out of any question or end their participation at any time.

Participant identity and data were protected under the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Code names were used to ensure anonymity. All paper and electronic records are securely stored in password-protected devices and locked cabinets accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all hard copies were shredded, and electronic files were permanently deleted to ensure secure data disposal.

Participant selection was based on purposive sampling, specifically targeting school leaders with firsthand experience in implementing technology-enhanced learning. Equal opportunity was given to eligible participants, and no one was excluded based on gender, religion, or social status. Appropriate compensation was provided, and interviews were conducted at accessible locations to ensure ease of participation. Data collection was scheduled at the participants' convenience.

Participants were informed that no identifiable personal data will be disclosed. Substantial contributions were verified with participants prior to public release to maintain the accuracy and integrity of findings. No conflict of interest was present. A summary of the results was shared with all participants, and a dissemination forum is organized to provide space for further engagement. A copy of the manuscript was submitted to the Graduate School at Assumption College of Nabunturan for transparency and scholarly sharing.

The researcher, is a teacher of one of the schools in Monkayo East District of Davao de Oro, is currently enrolled in the Master of Arts in Educational Administration program and has undergone relevant training in qualitative research and educational leadership. The study was guided by an academic adviser who provided oversight and technical assistance, ensuring adherence to sound research practices.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Experiences of teachers teaching out-of-field subject.

Handling out-of-field subjects poses significant challenges for teachers, especially when DepEd provides only curriculum guides without textbooks, leading to stress and uncertainty. As Informant 1 expressed, "*Lisod siya*, very hard*, kailangan paka magstudy, magdownload og* learning materials,"[Very hard, I need to study, download

learning material], highlighting the extra effort required. Teachers often feel unsure if their lessons align with DepEd standards, affecting their confidence. Informant 2 noted, "*Maglisod og tudlo, need jud magstudy, magresearch sa lesson para maexplain ug mapasabot jud og tarong sa mga estudyante,*" [Difficult to teach, I need to study, I need to research to explain the concept to the students] emphasizing the need for thorough preparation. Even with effort, understanding and delivering unfamiliar topics remains difficult, as Informant 3 shared, "I experienced some difficulties in understanding and comprehending, especially in delivering the topic." Informant 4 added, "Very challenging *kayo xa* example AP *og* TLE *wala koy idea mura ko og estudyante kay magstudy pa permi before magtudlo,"*[Very challenging I have no idea in AP and TLE, I need to study like a student] showing how teachers feel like students themselves. The lack of mastery can lower morale and affect education quality, as Informant 1 said, "*Makadegrade sa kaugalingon, mawala* ang quality of education."[It is self-degrading, the quality of education was gone.] Professional growth is also impacted, with Informant 2 stating, "It greatly affects my professional experience *dili lang sa akong major… kay dapat* equal teaching loads man jud in every school year." [Not only in my major, every school equal distribution of teaching load] Despite these struggles, teachers strive to adapt, as Informant 6 shared, "*Challenging siya sa akoa… gibuhat nako ang dapat nako buhaton… pinaagi sa pagresearch, mangutana sa mga teacher… nakat-on pos ko nga mahimong* resourceful."[Very Challenging, I do whatever I can, done researching, asking my co-teacher, and I learn to become resource] These experiences reflect the resilience and dedication of educators facing out-of-field teaching assignments

3.2 Challenges of teachers teaching out-of-field subject/s

Teachers face significant challenges when teaching out-of-field subjects, including a lack of references, unfamiliar terminology, and limited content mastery. Informants shared that DepEd only provided modules, which were often unclear, forcing them to exhaustively search for reliable materials *Matagbaw pangita og* reference*s [Need patience searching for references].* Shifting mediums of instruction, like using Filipino instead of English, added to the difficulty "*Lisod mag explain nga magtinagalog*"[Difficult to explain Filipino]. Teachers also struggled with subject-specific language, especially in areas like Music, where expertise is crucial. Without mastery, they resorted to basic activities just to meet daily requirements *"*Activity *ra ihatag kong walay study*"[Give only activities because unprepared]. Designing engaging, objective-aligned lessons was another hurdle, requiring creativity and deep understanding. As Informant 6 noted, constant reading and research were essential to grasp and teach unfamiliar topics effectively *"Kailangan gyud ko more on readings*" [Ireally need to do more reading]. These experiences highlight the resilience and adaptability of educators navigating out-of-field teaching.

3.3 Coping mechanism of teachers teaching out-of-field subject

Teachers handling out-of-field subjects often rely on traditional teaching methods due to limited content mastery, as one shared, "*Dili man nato* kabisado [I am not familiar]*,* I use the traditional way of teaching. To improve understanding, they use voice recordings, video lessons, and compare multiple sources to find what best fits learners. Strategies include watching videos to guide lesson delivery, researching online, downloading examples from platforms like YouTube, and using MELCs codes for content alignment. Collaboration is key. Teachers ask colleagues for strategies and materials, use PowerPoint for visual support, and practice transparency with students about their limitations, saying, "*Naging honest pod ko sa bata nga dili ko hawod o master ani nga subject*."[I become hones with the students about my limited knowledge of the topic.]

3.4 Insignts of teacher to out-of-field teachers

To cope with teaching out-of-field subjects, teachers studied during free time, attended trainings, watched video lessons, and sought help from colleagues. They used online resources, textbooks, and multimedia to understand content and improve delivery. One teacher shared, "Taman ra sa imong makaya, unsa imong natun-an mao rapod to imong mahatag,"[You can teach on what you can, what you learn base on your capacity] highlighting how limited time affects what can be taught. Another emphasized growth, saying, "I choose to embrace it as an opportunity to grow as a teacher." Despite challenges, consistent effort and collaboration helped them teach effectively beyond their expertise.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teacher competence plays a vital rule in delivering quality education to learners. A competent teacher brings the energy to make the teaching-learning process joyful, fruitful and meaningful. Teachers bring the enthusiasm to every learner to make learning memorable to everyone inside the four corners of the classroom.

As the implementer of the different programs of the Department of Education, teachers must be equipped with the necessary learning tools, materials, knowledge, and strategies to achieve the quality of education and send learners to the success of life they deserve

Out-of-field teaching phenomena are an international dilemma of teachers; therefore, it is high time for educational leaders to implement educational reforms to address this issue. Furthermore, this issue remains unresolved and continuously revolves in the educational system. More teachers are experiencing the same dilemma and are continuously striving to cope with the different challenges of teaching out-of-field subjects. The insights of this study can help teachers and school leaders to conduct strategic planning to solve and even alleviate some of the difficulties of teachers within the system. In future vacancies of the teaching force, school leaders can communicate with the teachers to find the right teacher to fill in the necessary major that is being loaded and to be taught by non-major teachers. In addition, proper training and seminars must be given to teachers to enhance their capabilities and to ensure the teachers' confidence is in full capacity to achieve the quality of education the learners deserve.

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