



“Why Me?”: Challenges and Insights of Private School Teachers Assigned to Out-of-Field Teaching

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RESEARCH ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Received: March 08, 2026 Reviewed: May 13, 2026 Accepted: June 24, 2026 Published: June 30, 2026  Copyright © 2026 by the Author(s). This open- access article is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.	Studies have considered the prevalence of out-of-field teaching as a growing concern in the Philippines. The mismatch between teachers’ fields of specialization and the availability of teaching units may have contributed to the downward trend in students’ academic achievement. This study explored the experiences of out-of-field teachers in the private secondary school set-up, focusing on their challenges and insights through a qualitative-phenomenological method. Through a content-validated interview guide, a focus group discussion was carried out with four (4) private secondary school teachers from Baguio City. A six-phase theoretical thematic analysis was employed. Three (3) major themes emerged as challenges, including the justification of out-of-field teaching assignments, the challenges of self-imposed pressure, and difficulties during the adjustment period, all related to a lack of preparation due to a mismatch. These arise from challenges in subject content and pedagogical knowledge that have affected their preparations. Four (4) major themes were generated from their insights based on their realizations, promoting positive attitudes toward out-of-field teaching. Insights include out-of-field teaching as a part of the continuous learning process, an instrument to promote unity in school, a component of self-discovery, and an advantage in simplifying lessons. These findings necessitate mentoring and professional development programs to support out-of-field teachers.

Keywords: *teaching assignment mismatch, out-of-field teaching, qualitative phenomenological research, content and pedagogical knowledge, professional development*

Introduction

In education, focusing mainly on the quality of teachers and their teaching methods is, without a doubt, among the foremost imperative components shaping students' learning and development (Ingersoll, 2003). The teachers' content knowledge, on the other hand, has been perceived as a critical factor in effective teaching, and more often than not, it depends on whether a teacher has a major/minor and certification in their field of expertise (Shulman, 1987). Out-of-field teaching is when teachers are assigned loads/subjects that are not their major, area of expertise, or field of specialization. Such a problem has been a concern for quite some time, but it is often overlooked in schools. It is a significant issue because teachers' qualifications are compromised, as highly qualified teachers may become less qualified when assigned subjects outside their field of specialization (Ingersoll, 2000).

Out-of-field teaching is not new; it refers to a teacher teaching a subject they have not studied beyond the first year of university. This suggests that they have not yet learned the relevant teaching methodology for that subject (Campanini, n.d.). Out-of-field teaching is called "education's dirty little secret" (Ingersoll, 2003). The number of instructors teaching outside their field is considerable. Budget cuts are one reason many school systems have unqualified teachers. Poor school management and other challenges in the education system are also to blame. The issue of the careless assignment of teachers is not new, but over the past two decades, it has come to be seen as one of the major hindrances to quality education.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 2007) raises questions about the common practice of assigning these young teachers to out-of-field positions. Hobbs (2012) and McConney and Price (2009) noted that the complex lived experiences of out-of-field teaching have been insufficiently researched. Insufficient research means inadequate understanding. It is reported that 39% of all science teachers in South Africa are unsuitably qualified (Silva, 2010), while 26.6% of math teachers, 28.7% of geography teachers, and 31.4% of physics teachers in the United Kingdom, are not suitably qualified for the subjects they teach (Loveys, 2011). Collard (2009) noted that transformation and change, such as adjustments to new and unfamiliar curricula, unfamiliar pedagogies, and changes in school leaders' theories and strategies, create personal experiences for teachers. Additionally, an Australian Government Productivity Commission Report (2012) found that principals reported difficulties assigning suitably qualified teachers in some subjects.

Moreover, Harris et al. (2005) underlined that no matter how good teachers' pedagogical skills are, teachers who lack knowledge in their discipline are manifestly unprepared. This simply means that content knowledge is a prerequisite to pedagogical knowledge. One cannot teach what they do not know. However, there is no single way of understanding the phenomenon of out-of-field teaching. This experience is complex and multifaceted. It involves teachers often being transferred from subject to subject or year level to year level, regardless of their field of qualification or expertise (Hobbs, 2012). To understand staffing problems such as out-of-field placements, open discussions

about the situation in schools and districts shed light on where the issues lie and how to correct misdiagnoses and prescriptions (Ingersoll, 2006).

These teachers teach outside their field of study or expertise, underscoring the need for content-area professional development to support their success (Ingersoll, 2002; Jacob, 2007). Mismatch occurs when there are not enough qualified teachers to teach core subjects, such as Math, English, or Science, forcing district administrators to choose from a pool of underqualified teachers (Futernick, 2010).

Unfortunately, too many professional learning activities are neither connected to teachers' actual practice nor to school improvement goals, nor are they designed to meet the needs of adult learners (Croft et al., 2010). Perhaps the worst consequence of out-of-field teaching is that it creates a vicious cycle. A teacher unsatisfied with their job will resign, leaving an urgent vacancy at the school. The school administrators then scramble to assign another teacher to fill the position—often an instructor with no background in that particular terrain. This teacher, in turn, becomes frustrated and eventually decides to leave, and the pattern repeats.

In addition, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2) in the Philippines revealed in its report that 67% of public high school teachers are assigned to roles that are not aligned with their specialization (Mejia et al., 2025). The policy notes underscored that this mismatch is caused by a greater systemic issue in the hiring and recruitment process of teachers in the country. The mismatch in the preparation of teachers and the in-service requirements leads to poor instructional quality, which further negatively affects student engagement. The pedagogical competencies of out-of-field teachers were affected simply by the misalignment between their preparation and assignments. Abutin et al. (2006) conducted a systematic literature review on the challenges faced by out-of-field teachers in the Philippines. They found that they frequently struggle with lesson planning, preparing instructional aids, mastering the content or subject matter, and responding to learners' questions. This may lead to poorer-quality instruction and place professional demands on the teacher to continually adapt to the landscape of the assigned subject area. Arribbay et al. (2024) also added that instructional delivery is largely associated with teacher training; hence, when they are assigned tasks that are not consonant with their educational preparation, it may lead to instructional delivery failure.

The impact of out-of-field teaching on students' performance has been supported by several empirical studies conducted in the Philippine context. Teaching subjects that are not aligned causes pedagogical difficulties. Orpiano et al. (2026) found that students performed better academically when teachers maintained alignment with their specialization. This is further supported by Acoba and Ariola (2025) who emphasized the effectiveness of teaching, instructional competence, and teacher preparation. Cañeda and Isidro (2025) also revealed that this phenomenon is associated with a shortage of teachers, which private secondary schools undoubtedly face. In a meta-synthesis study, other concerns were identified, such as addressing learner inquiries, managing lesson demands, and coping with inadequate instructional support. All of these ultimately affect the learning outcome and the quality of lesson delivery. A study exploring teachers' experiences is needed to understand their perspectives better and address the growing concern about teacher burnout, which may, in turn, improve existing policies, training, and retention programs.

This phenomenological study mainly explored the experiences of out-of-field teachers in a private secondary school. Specifically the challenges and insights arising

from the lived experiences of out-of-field secondary private school teachers in teaching subjects unaligned with their field of specialization were identified and described.

Methods

Research Design

A qualitative research design was employed in the study to explore and understand the condition or phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). The Qualitative Research Consultants Association (2006) further notes that this design is well-suited to studying people's reactions, ideas, and perceptions. It is appropriate to achieve the primary purpose of the research study, which is to describe and understand the experiences of teachers who have handled out-of-field classes. Furthermore, a phenomenological approach is employed to understand participants' experiences. Phenomenology prioritizes and investigates how individuals have experienced a phenomenon of interest (Manen & Adams, 2010). It aligns with the study's goal of understanding teachers' lived experiences in out-of-field teaching, generating themes that address their challenges and offer insights.

Participants of the Study

The participants were selected through purposive sampling, with a particular focus on the main criterion: their experience in teaching out-of-field subjects. The participants were secondary private school teachers in Baguio City with varying levels of teaching experience across junior high school levels and subject areas. All of the participants were licensed professional teachers, and their tenure in the institution ranged from 5 to 23 years. Two of the participants were MAPEH majors, one (1) majored in Science, and the final participant majored in English, producing a total of four (4). Wutich (2024) sets four (4) as the minimum for studies involving focus group discussions (FGDs). The prolonged and common experience of the participants in out-of-field teaching qualifies as a parameter for homogeneity and in accepting this sample size. It is inherent that the teachers were immersed in the phenomenon for a school year, as the secondary level of the primary education curriculum calls for it. A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted online and recorded with the participants' consent.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the FGD, the researchers crafted the question guide based on an a priori code validated by an expert in education (a PhD in language education holder and an expert in curriculum development). The validated question guide was used in the focus group discussion. Communication letters were sent to the school's principal for approval for the participation of the target participants from their school. Consent forms were also sent to participants to acknowledge their voluntary participation in the study.

Ground rules were laid out for the conduct of the FGD. The participants were asked to turn on their microphones and video cameras for the session. The entire session was recorded with participants' consent. The whole procedure was based on the fundamentals of conducting focus group discussions described by Grudens-Schuck et al. (2004). Recorded files were saved for safekeeping. Responses were transcribed and translated. The FGD data corpus was then processed and organized. A six-phased thematic analysis according to the perspective of Braun and Clarke (2006) as outlined

by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). The reflexive thematic analysis was composed of (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining themes, and (6) writing up.

The transcripts were translated into English. The researchers familiarized themselves with the responses and manually identified codes in reference to the research questions. The codes were grouped to generate the themes. These themes were then reviewed by identifying the specific elements that clearly show the unique characteristics of each theme. The initial themes were also regrouped by identifying their central organizing concepts, thereby formally defining the subthemes. Experts in the field validated the process. The participants also validated the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Participants gave written consent for review and signature before starting interviews. The study participants were invited via a letter of communication and an Informed Consent Form that emphasized the confidentiality of the data collected and the voluntary nature of participation. The head of the study locale approved the administration of the interview. The ground rules of the method used were outlined, including recording the video conference or meeting for the focus group discussion and recording the audio files for transcription and safekeeping, and their participation meant agreement to the Informed Consent Form. Not only did the researchers aim to increase the credibility of the data, but they also conducted an audit trail with the participants to recheck the information that was coded and analyzed.

Results and Discussion

The participants were briefed that previous affiliations would be taken into account when answering the questions. The FGD participants now teach in the field aligned with their undergraduate course. Nevertheless, they have experienced teaching out-of-field subjects during their careers.

The major themes and core ideas shown in Table 1 were generated through thematic analysis of the participants' responses. From their experiences in out-of-field teaching, three (3) themes emerged regarding the challenges they encountered. These themes are: justification of out-of-field teaching assignments, self-imposed pressure, and difficulty in the adjustment and transition period. The table also shows that the teachers have accepted their out-of-field teaching assignments because they were justified and considered a regular experience, especially for new entrants to the institution. The challenges they have encountered can be divided into two categories—internally imposed challenges and those inherent to the teachers' adjustment and transition period. Because the teachers who had previously handled the subject are specialists in the subject area, they were perceived by the teacher participants as more qualified to teach it. Hence, the teacher participants considered the possibility that students and teachers are comparing them. Because they believed the teachers who had previously taught the subject were specialists, they put additional pressure on themselves to deliver the lesson at the same level as a specialist.

Table 1. Themes and Categories of the Challenges Experienced during the Teachers' Out-of-Field Teaching

Themes	Categories
Out-of-Field Assignments as Part of Professional Responsibility	- Teachers perceived that the administrators considered subjects that are close to their undergraduate background when giving out-of-field teaching assignments. - Teachers viewed out-of-field teaching as an opportunity given by administrators for them to improve and challenge themselves. - Teachers thought that their administrators assigned them their out-of-field teaching assignment in consideration of the order of hiring.
Self-Imposed Pressure	- Teachers considered the possibility of comparisons by other teachers who had handled their subjects in their class activities (projects, strategies, effectiveness, etc.) - Teachers viewed out-of-field teaching assignments as a way for them to be forced to continue learning and break the monotony.
Difficulty in Adjustment and the Transition Period	- Teachers were surprised by the demands and unexpected tasks related to the subjects they had handled. - Teachers were challenged in the selection and application of the most appropriate teaching strategy that they employed in the delivery of their lessons. - Teachers found it difficult to prepare new materials and prepare for their classes to make sure that they deliver the lesson effectively.

Also, during the transition period (as they learn to teach the subject), teachers faced an additional task: they need to read more and prepare more instructional materials to ensure they deliver the lesson effectively. Moreover, they view selecting the most appropriate teaching strategy as a main challenge because it was their first time handling the assigned subject. Furthermore, there are tasks they have yet to anticipate that they must fulfill upon accepting the out-of-field teaching task.

Out-of-Field Assignments as Part of Professional Responsibility

The assignment of out-of-field subjects to teachers was normalized in the institution as part of the administration's strategy to address the shortage of teaching assignments and, at some point, the shortage of teachers. Participant 1 (P1) considered it justified because of the regularity of giving the assignment to teachers who have just entered the institution, reinforced by the availability of excess teaching units. P1 said:

Para mabigyan kayo ng idea, ang basis talaga ng loading ay kung sino ang una at huling na-hire. Doon pumapasok yong sinasabi nilang "Last in, first out". So, kapag binigyan ka ng ibang subjects para ituro, kailangan mong tanggapin kasi

'yon ang available na teaching load. (To give you an idea, the basis for giving teaching loads is the order of who got in first. That is when the concept of “Last in, first out” comes in. So, if they offer you to teach another subject (out-of-field), you need to accept it because that is what is available.) (Participant 1)

In addition, Participant 4 (P4) considers the possibility that administrators assess teachers' undergraduate educational backgrounds when offering out-of-field teaching assignments. P4 answered one of the questions:

From the admin perspective, I know they have to consider what is closest to my major. According to our principal, if you are teaching English, then you could also teach Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies). From her perspective, these two subject areas are closely related. She has our Transcript of Records, so she has access to our undergraduate subjects. (Participant 4).

This idea was further supported by FGD 1 in another comment:

Yes, I think that it is justified. Gaya nga ng sabi ko kanina, ang unang department na nabibigyan ng extra Health units ng MAPEH ay Science Department. Besides, the admin has access to our Transcript of Records, so they could see the subjects that we have taken before. (Yes, it is justified. As I mentioned earlier, the first department to receive additional Health units from the MAPEH department is the science department. Besides, the administration has access to our Transcript of Records, so they can see the subjects that we have taken before.)

Also, Participant 3 (P3), as referenced in this response, considers the justification: *“In my case, I accepted that as a challenge to myself.”* Although they perceived the assignment of these out-of-field teaching units as part of their responsibilities as members of the faculty, they noted that this may pose challenges, as they need to adapt to the instructional delivery demands of the subjects continuously. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013) defined demotivation as characteristics that contribute to the cancellation of teachers' existing motivations. The authors pointed out five (5) categories that may demotivate teachers. These are stress, teacher autonomy inhibition, insufficient self-efficacy, inadequate career structures, content repetition, and limited potential for intellectual development. Given the lack of career structures, teachers who were offered out-of-field teaching assignments may have been demotivated if their administrators did not justify the rationale for assigning them, especially since these assignments significantly impact teachers' career tracks. In addition, the participants believed their out-of-field teaching assignment was justified and viewed it as an opportunity for improvement. Regarding the last category in Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2013) work, teachers may be motivated if they are continually challenged and shown that out-of-field teaching offers opportunities for intellectual development.

Self-Imposed Pressure

Another theme that emerged in the thematic analysis is self-imposed pressure. Participant 2 (P2) believed that other teachers and even students might make comparisons, since other teachers had taught the subject for a relatively long time. P2 shared, *“The most challenging part in that experience is the pressure of comparison, especially since other teachers have already handled the subject before me.”* P3 further supported this in another comment, *“It is correct that your co-teachers who have handled the same subject may say something about how you have taught the subject...”* Additionally, P3 noted in their response that it is a way for administrators to encourage them to challenge themselves, as emphasized in the answer of FGD 3:

When I was asked to teach MAPEH in the elementary, I asked myself, 'Why me?'. Then I realized I also needed it to break the monotony of my teaching. It is like saying I am getting bored with teaching, so you must constantly challenge yourself.

In a study by Kolleck (2019), teacher collaboration was perceived as a threat to teachers' autonomy. It has also been pointed out in the third theme. The importance of unity in school lies in the mentoring program, which has been highly valued as a coping mechanism for teachers assigned to subjects outside their field, especially given the challenges they face. It can be said that there is a definite involvement from teachers who have taught the subjects before, and they may perceive it as a threat, since it is seen as a source of comparison. This is supported by Alsobaie (2015) in their discussion about the power of teachers in the classroom. Expert power is necessary to establish authority in the school, which may be threatened if students and even other teachers perceive another person as more qualified to teach the subject the teacher offers. Moreover, du Plessis et al. (2014) noted in a transnational study that the lack of pedagogical knowledge is a recognized source of insecurity for teachers outside the field. Furthermore, the influence of providing intellectual opportunities, such as the challenges posed by out-of-field teaching, and teachers' motivation may help explain the need for teachers to request out-of-field teaching units (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013).

Difficulty in Adjustment and Transition Period

The third theme, derived from the thematic analysis, concerns the difficulties teachers have experienced during the adjustment and transition from teaching in their specialization to an out-of-field teaching assignment. One of the participants pointed out that they were unexpectedly asked to perform tasks in the subject they were supposed to teach, as evident in the following interview extract:

Hindi ko lang inexpect na mayroon palang ibang mga kailangang gawin sa subject other than teaching na ipapagawa ng department head. Halimbawa, kailangan naming i-check 'yong hygiene ng mga bata especially na pure boys pa ang school noon. (I did not expect that there were tasks to be done in that subject that the department head asked me to do. For example, we need to do hygiene checks, considering that they are all boys in the school at that time.) (Participant 1)

Moreover, Participant 3 and Participant 4 agreed that transitioning from specialization to an out-of-field teaching assignment is difficult, especially in preparing materials and selecting teaching strategies to deliver the lesson effectively. Participant 4 said, *"The most challenging part in that teaching experience, of course, is to look for an appropriate strategy for a specific subject matter."* This is further supported in the following comment:

Most of the challenges I encountered were with the bulk of the reading materials I needed to review before entering my class. Also, with the instructional materials that I need to prepare, especially since these are elementary students and they are more visual learners, I need to print pictures, etc...Kaya noong umakyat ako sa high school, grabe 'yong adjustment ko kasi I was asked to teach my specialization, which is Social Studies, and I found it difficult to go back to teaching that. (When I transferred to the high school department, I had to adjust because I was asked to teach my specialization, Social Studies, and I found it difficult to return to teaching.) (Participant 3)

Regarding participants' responses, out-of-field teaching is viewed as an opportunity for professional development. Du Plessis et al. (2014) cited Timperley et al. (2007) in discussing the cyclical process of teachers' career development. This leadership idea holds that an out-of-field teacher can become a specialist with the help of another specialist. This is in consideration of the lack of formal professional development programs for these teachers, which supports the idea that out-of-field teaching can produce specialists once deployed in their outside-specialization assignments. However, the study's participants reported receiving mentoring programs and formal professional development, including training, seminars, and workshops.

Table 2. Major Themes and Categories of the Insights in the Teachers' Out-of-Field Teaching Experiences

Themes	Categories
Teaching as a Continuous Process of Learning	- Teachers found trainings, workshops, and seminars to be important preparations for out-of-field teaching. - Teachers perceived the connection between the undergraduate preparation and the out-of-field teaching assignment given to them as an application.
Importance of Unity in School	- Teachers considered mentoring as a way to share strategies, materials, and activities in their classes. - Teachers considered that there is a need for teamwork in school, like listening to each other's needs and adjusting to these needs to accommodate the betterment of all. - Teachers had seen the side of administrators in assigning out-of-field teaching units.
Out-of-Field Teaching as a Component of Self-Discovery	- Teachers found their experience in out-of-field teaching as a way for them to realize that specialization is not a measure of becoming an effective teacher. - Teachers regarded their out-of-field teaching experience as an unexpected yet positive outcome, contrary to what they had initially expected.
Development of Coping Strategies and Adaptive Confidence	- Teachers thought that it became beneficial to the students when the teachers who had handled their subjects were able to go to the level of their students. - Teachers appreciated out-of-field teaching as an opportunity for self-improvement.

Table 2 presents the major themes and core ideas from teachers' insights into their out-of-field teaching experiences. These insights were generated from their entire experience with the tasks. Four (4) primary themes were derived: teaching as a continuous learning process, the importance of unity in school, out-of-field teaching as a component of the self-discovery process, and out-of-field teaching as an advantage.

Participants have emphasized that training, workshops, and seminars are essential for coping with this challenge, just as teachers need to continue their professional development. The teachers saw the connection between their undergraduate subjects and the possibility of being given such out-of-field teaching assignments. This point relates to the idea that is used to support the first theme identified earlier. The teachers also viewed this as evidence of communication that reinforces unity in the school. The teachers felt that the school community must identify its needs and help one another, even if that means accepting out-of-field teaching assignments for the group's betterment. Mentoring programs were also recognized as one way to address these problems and to promote unity in the school. Since these are communicated to teachers, they also know how administrators feel when assigning them. As the table shows, out-of-field teaching served as an instrument for self-discovery and student benefit. First, this experience led the teachers to unexpected discoveries about their capabilities as they accepted and overcame the challenge. This led them to realize that teaching effectively does not require being a specialist in a particular field. The teachers also perceived the possibility that this is an advantage for students. After all, they empathize with how they feel (about the difficulty of learning the subject) because they have experienced it before.

Teaching as a Continuous Process of Learning

The first theme, derived from the participants' key takeaways, is the realization that learning is a continuous process, as underscored in the following interview extract:

I am fortunate that the administration supported my assignment and I was able to attend a lot of training, seminars, and workshops. After all, teaching is a continuous learning process, so I did not take that [being loaded with the out-of-field-teaching units] as a negative thing. (Participant 3)

As identified in the first central theme, the teachers have recognized that administrators may see a connection between the records in their educational backgrounds and their out-of-field teaching assignments. This insight is also supported by the following interview responses:

My specialization is General Science, and it is very close to the Health subject I was asked to teach. I have not encountered any problem in preparing my lessons in terms of the content because the only thing I needed to do at that time was to review my notes and lessons in the undergrad and prepare for the materials in my class. (Participant 1)

This was also given prominence by Participant 4 who stated, *"I believe that the administrators consider the educational background of the teachers. They will not assign you a teaching load if they think that you cannot teach it."* Regarding participants' responses, out-of-field teaching is viewed as an opportunity for professional development. An out-of-field teacher can become a specialist with the help of another specialist once deployed in their outside-specialization assignments. However, this study's participants reported receiving mentoring programs and formal professional development, including training, seminars, and workshops (Timperley et al., 2007, as cited in du Plessis et al., 2014).

Importance of Unity in School

The second theme that emerged from the participants' takeaways was the importance of school unity. Teachers see mentoring as a critical process in the

transition, ensuring that school culture is passed down from one seasoned teacher to another, as emphasized in the following interview extract:

A mentoring program in schools goes a long way. It is one way to support those handling subjects not aligned with their field of specialization. It helps them not only in teaching the subject but also in transitioning from college to school work since most of us have experienced handling these subjects when we were at the stage of our career in the school where we are hired. (Participant 4)

This was supported by the comment of another participant about the transfer of materials from teachers who have previously handled the subjects (out-of-field):

Yes, I also appreciate that the materials from the previous teacher who handled the subject were handed down to me. Since the subject I have handled is CAT (Citizenship Advancement Training), the subject is not highly technical regarding the content I needed to teach. (Participant 2)

This kind of response also highlights the importance of understanding their colleagues' needs and making adjustments and compromises to avoid jeopardizing everyone's tenure in the department. This is evident in the following interview extract:

My case was more of a consensus when the department discussed it. We need to save a department member, which is why one of us needs to accept that extra teaching unit (out-of-field) so our colleague can also have some teaching units. It is more of a sacrifice. (Participant 2)

Participant 2 further supported this comment as he explained, *"The experiences I have shared here prove that teamwork is needed in schools. Sometimes, we need to sacrifice for the sake of others, which we also need to do in schools."* Furthermore, the participants have also identified communication between administrators and teachers as essential to maintaining unity in the school. Knowing what their administrators might have thought of when they were deciding on assigning the out-of-field assignments was the focus of the response of Participant 1, *"... it is about knowing the value of work. At the end of the day, it is about knowing the needs of the school."*

Essentially, du Plessis et al. (2014) provided several ideas supporting the view that out-of-field teaching promotes unity in schools through communication and recognition of the interrelationship among effective professional development practices. This also underscores the importance of open communication between the administration and teachers in policymaking. Also, one of the most significant insights from this study is the importance of open communication among administrators and teachers, and among teachers themselves. Leadership is more effective when the focus is on teachers' human needs rather than on the system being followed (Curry, 2013). This is also true in an intra-departmental setup, as teachers share their concerns, as identified in the earlier coding.

Another significant core idea under this major theme is the importance of school-based mentoring programs. Teachers consult the specialist teachers who have previously handled the subject. Hudson (2012) emphasized the concern about the preparation of new teachers. It had been noted in the FGD results earlier that out-of-field teaching units were often assigned to teachers who arrived last at the institution. It has been shown that mentoring programs for teachers facing challenges in curriculum implementation, classroom management, and pedagogy positively affect student achievement (Mizell, 2010).

Out-of-Field Teaching as a Component of Self-Discovery

One of the key realizations among the teacher participants is the role of out-of-field teaching in their self-discovery process. It led them to realize that teaching effectively does not require a specialization aligned with their teaching assignment, as explained in the following response by Participant 3, *“Knowing how good a teacher you are is not defined by the specialization you graduated with. Sometimes, it is with your determination to learn.”* Also, as part of the self-discovery process, the teachers found that their out-of-field teaching was a positive learning experience. In fact, Participant 3 mentioned some of his “aha!” moments:

At some point, we have to adjust to know our capabilities. At first, I was nervous when handling MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health) because I knew it was not my [specialization]; however, when I started teaching, ‘Aha! Masaya pala!’, ‘Aha! Kaya ko pala!’ (Aha! It turned out fun! I did it!). For me, it is a challenge to myself because I need to continue advancing. (Participant 3)

The study shows how out-of-field teaching contributed to teachers’ self-esteem and confidence as they overcame obstacles and saw that they had effectively delivered their lessons to their students. However, contrary to the findings of du Plessis et al. (2014), most teachers reported feeling “not good” about their out-of-field teaching assignments. This can be argued with the study of Timperley et al. (2007), which emphasized the cyclical process of the evolution of the teaching career—teachers may become specialists even if they did not undergo formal training and relied solely on mentoring. The realization of having overcome this challenge may have led participants to respond positively to the impact of out-of-field teaching.

Development of Coping Strategies and Adaptive Confidence

The last major theme in the analysis is the idea that out-of-field teachers developed strategies to cope with the challenges of the phenomenon, as well as adaptive confidence in handling these assignments. Participant 4 pointed out how teachers who have handled out-of-field teaching assignments can simplify their lesson delivery by empathizing with what the students may be experiencing, as revealed in the following extract:

I think that one of the advantages of teaching a subject that is not your specialization is that you can go to the level of the students. ‘Yong mga naranasan natin noong pinag-aaralan natin at kung ano ang mahirap sa mga subjects na ‘yon, alam na natin kung ano lang ang kailangan nila. (Based on our experiences with that subject and the identified difficulties, we now know what they only need.) We can deliver the lesson most simply so that they will be able to understand it. (Participant 4)

Another essential point is that teachers have recognized that out-of-field teaching is an opportunity for self-improvement. P3 said, *“As teachers, we need to keep learning, which is one way for us to be forced to learn new things.”* In-field teachers are more effective than out-of-field teachers (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). It was further supported by data indicating the effectiveness of assigning students to mathematics teachers in mathematics classes. It had better achievement scores than those assigned to out-of-field teachers. However, a more recent study conducted by Dee and Cohodes (2008), based on quantitative research, reported that in-field teachers were effective in only two subject areas. Still, no significant relationship was derived to support the same idea in other subject areas. This implies that certification in a particular specialization, such

as educational background, is insufficient to ensure that students will achieve high scores. This further supports the insights of the teacher participants in the study.

Conclusion and Future Works

The phenomenological study generally aimed to explore the challenges and insights of teachers in out-of-field teaching. The themes and data indicated that the difficulties experienced by the participants naturally arose from inadequate preparation in educational and academic training. These include challenges relevant to subject-area and pedagogical knowledge. There were also self-imposed challenges, such as pressure arising from comparison with specialists in the field. Interestingly, this study found that overcoming these challenges led the participants to form a very positive attitude towards their experience in out-of-field teaching, which includes the realization of the value of unity, building of self-esteem, self-confidence, and efficiency in the subject area they taught, and utilization of mentoring and continuous self and professional development programs.

The study focused only on the inputs from four (4) participants in the FGD. Other studies may increase the sample size to further validate the findings presented in this study. Given the conflicting results observed in other corroborated work, it is essential that the administration become vocal about career paths and that teachers be open about their career trajectories to strengthen communication in the school. Moreover, the participants have overcome the challenges of out-of-field teaching with the help not only of their colleagues but also of the administration. Consequently, more robust, monitored professional development programs must be implemented to support teachers assigned to out-of-field teaching units. Furthermore, being open to accepting out-of-field teaching units and having a positive attitude towards them opens opportunities for the teacher to view them as avenues for promoting professional development and strengthening professional community relationships in the school.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Declaration Statement

AI tools were limited to refining the grammar and coherence of the paper's statements, particularly Grammarly. Additionally, no other AI tools were employed in this research study.