

# **LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN HANDLING OUT-OF-FIELD TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study determined the lived experiences of public secondary school teachers in handling out-of-field assignments. A qualitative research design using phenomenological inquiry is used in this study to derived fluid, subjective and actual perspectives of the participants regarding their struggles of handling out of field assignments. The results reveal that all of the participants gave their approval to handle the subjects with a primary reason that they don't have control when it comes to loading. The participants explained their reasons for out-of-field teaching assignments. The Participants gave three reasons for accepting the load that include: leader decision, teacher shortage, and personal decision. Moreover, after obtaining the reasons of the participants in accepting out of field assignments, they were ask to share their experiences during the duration of time that they handle out of field subjects. Out from their narratives, it generated two themes, namely: confidence issues and disconnectedness. Furthermore, most of the coping mechanisms reported by participants often involve "self" or self-intervention. The themes that emerged from teachers as their way of coping with the struggles brought about by out of field teaching involve personal acceptance to the situation and self-determination.

Keywords: education, live experiences, public secondary school, teachers, out-of-field, teaching assignments, qualitative

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The quality of teachers and teaching are undoubtedly among the most important factors shaping the learning and growth of students. Thus, it is imperative that the classrooms are all staffed with qualified teachers who are teaching in their own field of expertise or match

with their training and education to ensure the quality of student's learning. Kasher (2005) suggest that specialization provides the basis for competent service delivery with respect to distinctive patterns of practice in essential domains. Moreover, Akiba, et al. (2009) articulated in their research that the teacher quality is the crucial driving force for improving student achievement and thus promoting a nation's economic competitiveness in the global society.

However, although ensuring that each classroom are all having specialized Faculty is a perennially important issue among schools, it is also among the least understood, especially in regard to the sources of the problem. One of the least recognized of these sources is the phenomenon known as out-of-field teaching—teachers assigned to teach subjects which do not match their training or education. The phenomenon of out-of-field teaching is a crucial issue because highly qualified teachers, may actually become highly unqualified if they are assigned to teach subjects for which they have little training or education (Ingersoll, 2002). The problem of assigning teachers to the subjects they are not trained into is very common and this has upsetting effect on the quality of education (Akiba et al., 2009). The out-of-field teaching not just dissatisfies the students but also the teachers who don't feel comfortable teaching subjects which they did not receive training (Silva, 2010).

Even in developed country such as United States, the out-of-field teaching is a serious problem across the nation (Ingersoll, 2002). These findings on out-of-field teaching have been replicated. Several other researchers have calculated levels of out-of-field teaching using the same, or similar, data sources and, although different analysts have focused a wide range of different measures of out-of-field teaching, all have reached the same conclusion— that high levels of out-of-field teaching are a leading source of underqualified teaching in American schools (Bobbitt & McMillen 1995; Bandeira de Mello & Broughman 1996; Smerdon et al. 1999).

In the Philippines, when teachers handle subjects outside their expertise, they are often dependent on the materials that are provided by the Department of Education. And most often than not, the input is inadequate or insufficient. Given this fact, the knowledge of these out-of-field teachers are limited compared to those who are trained in the field. And so in the process the students' knowledge is also limited to what teachers impart. As previous DepEd Secretary Armin Luistro, cited by Malipot (2014) said that the Philippines lack of trained teachers, especially teachers in critical early grades and in disadvantaged areas, remains a problem.

To date, the problem of out-of-field teaching is very difficult to address since there are shortage of specialized teachers particularly in the rural areas. With this, the researcher being also assigned in subjects that is out-of-field, have developed interest in investigating the lived experiences of teachers who are assigned with subjects that are away from their field of expertise. Moreover, there is no study in the literature that focus on the struggles of Filipino teachers having out-of-field assignments. Thus, this study can be used as basis by the Principal in the guidelines particularly in Faculty loading, and in the bigger policies relating to recruitment and selection of teachers in the Department of Education.

## **METHOD**

In this research study, I employed qualitative research design using phenomenological approach since it provides an exploration of the multidimensional experiences of the teachers handling out of field assignments. Hence, a phenomenological approach was the most appropriate as it aims to determine what an experience means for persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived; in other words, the essences or structures of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

In phenomenology the researcher seeks to describe the core or essence of those experiencing the event and provide understanding of that phenomenon at a deeper level (Creswell, 2007). These concepts are at the core of the constructivist worldview and well supported through a phenomenological research approach. Research scholars have promoted qualitative research as an inquiry process that explores the many facets of human experience and provides a rich, holistic picture of a phenomenon or experience (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The phenomenological approach allowed for the in-depth exploration of the experiences of public secondary school teachers in handling out-of-field assignments.

This endeavor explored the experiences of participants from a population who considered education as an essential motivator towards development of oneself and the nation, only to find out that they would be experiencing struggles in their service in the public schools.

In-depth personal interviews were the data collection method as recommended by Moustakas (1994). These interviews were

open-ended and informal as the participant and I engaged in an interactive dialog that drew out a full description of the individual's experience.

Participants were informed of their rights to confidentiality, privacy protection, and anticipated risks and benefits of participating in the study. Only when the participant had signed the consent form did I begin the interview.

I personally gathered the data and conduct in-depth interviews with 11 informants. The interview is focused on the difficult experiences they underwent in their service as educators in the public school in handling out of field assignments. I recorded the interviews with an electronic digital recording device. The digital interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist into a typed electronic form and reviewed by me for accuracy. Interview transcripts were shared with participants to ensure their words were accurately recorded. Corrections and clarifications were sought at that time, but no participant desired either.

In the identification of my research informants, they were co-teacher or colleague whom I chose initially select through purposive sampling as my participants based on a pre-selected criterion relevant to my study (Tongco, 2007), who are teachers in public secondary schools, having out-of-field assignments, and has been teaching for at least one year.

Purposive sampling was utilized through the key informant technique wherein one or a few individuals will be solicited to act as guides to a culture (Tongco, 2007). Purposeful selection requires the identification of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon to be studied and is willing to participate in the study; Creswell (2007) references this approach as criterion sampling.

The number of individuals required for a strong phenomenological study results when the data reaches a point of saturation when no new information is being collected from new participants (Creswell, 2007). I found I had achieved saturation upon interviewing 11 teachers from the study population.

In obtaining data about how the participants think and feel in the most direct ways, I have conducted in-depth one-on-one interviewing, direct participant observation, and focus group discussions. This method, in fact, is based on an assumption fundamental to qualitative research: The participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views

it not as the researcher views it. The interviewing has limitations and weaknesses, and involve personal interaction; where cooperation is essential (Cresswell, 2007).

In this study, I used informed consent form with introductory script detailing specifically to the participants the purpose of the study, what was the study involved, why they were asked to take part, that their participation were voluntary, and confidential and their identification in the study were anonymous, what would happen to the information they gave, what would happen to the results, what would be the possible disadvantages in taking part and the contact numbers of the researcher. In addition, wherever possible, the interviews were conducted in areas free from distractions and at times and locations that were most suitable for the study participants (Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### Reasons of Teachers in Accepting Out of Field Assignments

The participants were asked on their approval in accepting out-of-field teaching assignments. All of the participants gave their approval to handle the subjects with a primary reason that they don't have control when it comes to loading. The participants explained their reasons for out-of-field teaching assignments. These reasons, themes and frequency of views among teachers are shown in Table 1. The Participants gave three reasons for accepting the load that include: leader decision, teacher shortage, and personal decision.

Leader Decision. Most of the participants mentioned that they cannot do anything to change the loading that were given to them by the participants. Since most of them are new teachers, they are advised by the senior teachers not to oppose the mandate of the Principal. These results indicate the bureaucracy of the organization and that only those from authority have the control particularly in the aspects of loading. Among the narratives include the following:

It is the order of the principal that I'll be given the loads that are not aligned with my field of expertise.  
(P1)

There's no choice because it's given right away by the Principal through our subject Coordinator Head

(P2)

I can't say "no" with the Principal because it's her call and authority to distribute the loads to her teachers (P4)

I can't contradict with our principal because I am afraid that she might not approved my future request to her if I don't accept the load (P5)

Teacher Shortage. The main reason given to them by their principal is due to scarcity of teachers in handling the subjects. There were some subjects that only have less of few teachers and there's no more item available to add new teachers. With this, the Principal is forced to distribute it to other teachers even not in their line of discipline, and particularly to new entry or beginning teachers. The following are the view of the participants:

There is no teacher available to teach the subject that's why I was told to accept and teach the subject (P6)

No one in our school is available to teach the subject, and I understand that there's scarcity of teachers (P10)

Personal decision. Since most of them are beginner teachers, they opt to follow orders from the Principal and personally decide to accept whatever is given to them. Moreover, some teachers admit that teaching is their vocation and that they can find ways to become effective even if the subjects that are given to them are not in their field. Among the narratives are as follows:

I just received it right away without hesitation because I knew that it's not good to refuse subject load (P3)

I'm accepting it because it's my vocation to teach whether it is aligned to my expertise or not it doesn't matter for as long as im happy as a teacher (P11)

I can accept any subject because it's my obligation to nurture my students as a professional teacher (P4)

<b>Core Relevant Narrative Formed from Quotation</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Frequency of Views</b>
<i>It is the order of the principal (P1)</i> <i>There's no choice because it's given right away by the Principal (P2)</i> <i>We can't say "no" with the Principal (P4)</i> <i>We can't contradict with our principal (P5)</i>	<b>Leader Decision</b>	9
<i>There is no teacher available to teach the subject (P6)</i> <i>No one in our school is available to teach the subject (P10)</i>	<b>Teacher Shortage</b>	4
<i>I just received it right away without hesitation (P3)</i> <i>I'm accepting it because it's my vocation to teach (P11)</i>	<b>Personal Decision</b>	5

The results of this study indicates that most principals allowed out of field teaching assignments because they wanted to ensure that all teachers have teaching loads regardless of what subjects that they are teaching. The teachers allowed the loadings out of respect to authorities and also considered it a challenge as part of their profession.

In a similar study, Hobbs (2013) asked teachers why they felt that they were out-of-field teachers. Teachers' responses were grouped into such categories as issues relating to qualifications, issues relating to teaching and pedagogy, student-related issues and teachers' personal responses, attitudes and motivations.

### Lived Experiences in Handling Out of Field Assignments

After obtaining the reasons of the participants in accepting out of field assignments, they were ask to share their experiences during the duration of time that they handle out of field subjects. Out from their narratives, it generated two themes, namely: confidence issues and disconnectedness.

Confidence Issues. Most of the participants developed uncertainty if they can deliver well the out of field subjects that were given to them. As a matter of fact, they feel unprepared in the classroom and sometimes became uneasy while sharing the lessons to their students. They considered themselves somewhat

not contributing something for the students but have also given their best by researching more about the topics and look for better instructional materials. Among the issues include the following:

It's a risk on my part because I cannot give assurance that I can deliver well the lessons (P2)

I got worried if I can deliver the subject properly knowing that I have zero knowledge in some subjects assigned to me (P4)

I am afraid of being unable to impart what's best for the students (P8)

Disconnectedness. Many teachers realized that by handling the out of field subjects they are able to detach themselves to their real discipline. They find difficulty in situating themselves in the field that are not in their expertise. Hence, majority cannot align the topics or concepts to the real or actual scenario. Moreover, the difficulty in getting lecture materials had worsened it and made them struggle a lot. The narratives include the following:

It's tiresome to prepare materials in subjects that are not in my field (P6)

I had some difficulties because I cannot align the topics with what I know in my field (P8)

I find it difficult because it's not in line with my field and I don't have learning materials (P9)

It's very stressful for me to prepare the lesson since I encountered difficulty even in understanding the terminologies of the subject (P3)

Table 2. Participants' Lived Experiences in Handling Out of Field Assignments

<b>Core Relevant Narrative Formed from Quotation</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Frequency of Views</b>
<i>It's a risk on my part (P2)</i> <i>I got worried if I can deliver the subject properly (P4)</i> <i>I am afraid of being unable to impart what's best for the students (P8)</i>	<b>Confidence Issues</b>	5
<i>It's tiresome to prepare materials in</i>	<b>Disconnectedness</b>	4



*subjects that are not in my field (P6)*  
*I had some difficulties because I*  
*cannot align the topics with what I*  
*know in my field (P8)*  
*I find it difficult because it's not in line*  
*with my field and I don't have*  
*learning materials (P9)*

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The results indicates that the teachers handling out of field assignments are unsure of their capacity, and has the tendency to question their own self about being misaligned to their field of expertise. There will be a feeling of guilt among them especially when they are not meeting the expectations of the subject. It can be argued that out-of-field teaching also brings along emotional experiences that affects the effectiveness of the teachers .

Sharplin (2014) also stated that out-of-field teachers felt alienated because of the inconsistency between their field of study and their field of assignment, thus preventing any chance to use their professional skills. According to Umoinyang, Akpan and Ekpo (2011), the employment of out-of-field teachers is one of the reasons for students' failure in basic subjects such as math and science. Coping of Teachers

Some teachers had severe emotional experiences, ended up in counselling with their friends and colleagues and had to reflect often because of their struggle to deal with these emotional experiences. However, most of the coping mechanisms reported by participants often involve "self" or self-intervention. The themes that emerged are personal acceptance to the situation and self-determination as shown in Table 3.

Acceptance to the situation. Many of the participants realized that acceptance is the only way to deal with their frustrations and struggles while handling out of field assignments. They knew that acceptance to the situation can help them move on and focus with the subjects that they are assigned. Their concentration became better after understanding that it's not permanent but just temporary that for now there's no available teachers to handle the subject. Among the narratives are:

I had no choice but to accept and follow the mandate of our Principal. I'll just study the subjects given to me and move on (P2)

So far I already accepted this subject so I have to

move on and try my best to deliver it well (P3)

I learned to love the subject and seems very interesting to read books that aren't in my field (P11)

I felt happy because I was able to learn about the content of other subjects (P9)

Self-determination. The teachers also realize that their assignments serve as a challenge for them as part of their profession. They look more of a benefit than the risk of handling out of field assignments. Some believe that it would boost their concentration to focus more on understanding the subject matter, conducting research, and making lecture materials to help them explain better the subject matter. Also, some teachers became used already and became grateful that they have expanded their learning by teaching other subjects that are not in their field.

It made me grow and study more about other areas and course discipline (P10)

I was able to impart the important things to the students by always reading the important concepts of the subject even if it's not aligned to my expertise (P7)

I now feel confident in doing my duty that I have been trusted to teach in an area that is not aligned to my field (P11)

The results indicate that teachers handling out of field are often disturbed emotionally, and most of them have doubts and disappointments. They tend to spend a lot of energy reflecting on and stressing about their teaching environment. To make them feel comfortable, they must learn to accept it and should consider the positive side of it. This is supported by Du Plessis, Carroll and Gillies (2013) as reported in their study that out-of-field teachers made use of their specialization to teach effectively, and their self-intervention made way for a better learning output to their students due to their acceptance and motivation.

Table 3. Participants' Coping After Handling Out of Field Assignments

<b>Core Relevant Narrative Formed from Quotation</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Frequency of Views</b>
<i>I had no choice but to accept and follow the mandate of our Principal (P2)</i> <i>So far I already accepted this subject so I have to move on (P3)</i> <i>I learned to love the subject (P5)</i> <i>I felt happy because I was able to learn about the content of other subjects (P9)</i>	<b>Acceptance to the situation</b>	6
<i>It made me grow and study more (P10)</i> <i>I was able to impart the important things to the students (P7)</i> <i>I now feel confident in doing my duty (P11)</i>	<b>Self-Determination</b>	3

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## IMPLICATIONS

Implication to Educational Management. The out-of-field teaching happened because of the difficulty of staffing commonly exist in the provincial areas or rural communities. The Principal needs to strategize in order to fill-in all the subjects since the availability of teachers are necessary for an academic institution. However, the academic quality will be affected if the teachers handling out of field do not receive any focused attention or support such as seminars and trainings to compensate their needs in handling the subject. If the teachers will receive support that they need, their out-of-field experience will be seen as an opportunity for career development and change.

Implication to teaching. The teachers handling out of field assignments will feel uncomfortable with the subject and has the tendency to become frustrated especially when they are pressured to understand the concepts that are not aligned to their field. This out of field teaching can provide negative emotional impact to the teachers and may lead to disappointments and failure of teachers to deliver well the subject matter.

However, to some teachers, especially those who can adjust quickly does have some advantages such as introducing different perspectives on teaching since out-of- field teachers can combine their field of study with teaching. Also this will provide challenges

particularly among beginning teachers to exert more efforts and develop their skills in researching and making teaching materials for their students. Most of the teachers need to develop their self-esteem by considering all challenges into a positive outlook.

Implications to Educational Stakeholders. While giving out-of-field teaching assignments to teachers may not have the approval of educational stakeholders, those who are willing to take risks with their subjects in order to develop will be perceived by stakeholders as impressive teacher due to their observable diligent efforts. In fact, most parents perceive teachers show appreciation and respect to teachers who are in control of their teaching position. The ability to adjust to a given situation and self determination to perform better in class will have appreciation to all stakeholders even if they are teaching those subjects that are not aligned in their field.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and implications of the study, the following recommended:

1. Since out-of-field teaching cannot be prevented due to scarcity of teachers in rural areas, there is a need to send teachers to seminars and trainings to upgrade their learning on the subject matter.
2. . The Department of Education shall provide teaching materials for every subject to be used especially by teachers who have subjects that are not aligned in their field of expertise.
3. The school may venture for collaborative teaching to make up for the demands of the school especially in subjects that have insufficient supply of teachers.

