

Classroom Experiences of Teachers Handling Subjects Beyond Their Area of Specialization

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Abstract— This study explores the experiences of teachers teaching subjects outside their area of specialization at Gallanosa National High School. Thirty teachers, primarily females aged 25-35 with 5-9 years of teaching experience in Technical Livelihood Education (TLE) and Home Economics (HE), were surveyed. Findings highlight that teachers often face challenges but cope through research, professional development, and seeking assistance. School heads provide support through strategies, expert connections, and collaboration. The study proposes a seminar to improve teaching effectiveness in unfamiliar subjects. It concludes that teacher commitment, coping strategies, and technical support can enhance teaching beyond their specialization.

Keywords— classroom experiences, coping mechanisms, teacher, teaching beyond specialization, technical assistance

INTRODUCTION

Teaching beyond one's expertise can affect the quality of education, as teachers may lack the necessary knowledge and skills. While teachers are expected to be flexible, this can lead to concerns over their ability to meet students' needs.

In line with the Philippine Constitution (1987), which mandates quality education for all citizens, the Department of Education has struggled with teacher shortages, resulting in many teachers being assigned subjects beyond their qualifications. This misalignment is particularly problematic in Senior High School, where tracks and strands (Academic, Arts and Design, Sports, Technical-Vocational-Livelihood) may not match teachers' expertise. Dutton (2016) notes that teacher efficacy is critical, as teachers with higher self-efficacy tend to experiment with innovative approaches and maintain quality education despite teaching outside their fields.

Teacher perceptions of their effectiveness are often based on their understanding of the subject they teach (Fennema & Franke, as cited in Ishiekwen & Ambe B., 2014). Pope (2013) emphasizes that teachers with high self-efficacy tend to perform better, even when handling unfamiliar subjects. However, teacher flexibility can be limited by concerns about their ability to deliver quality education in unfamiliar areas. Teachers, like workers in other professions, must adapt to new challenges, seeing them as opportunities rather than burdens.

The current teacher workforce includes many young, inexperienced educators who are willing to embrace the

challenges of teaching despite heavy responsibilities (Sulit, 2017). While years of experience are correlated with higher student achievement (Hanushek, Rivkin, & Schiman, 2016), not all experienced teachers are more effective than newer ones. Experience often enhances teacher efficacy, particularly when teachers work in supportive environments and become more familiar with the subjects they teach (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). However, there is considerable variation in teacher effectiveness at every career stage.

Despite the challenges, experienced teachers, having honed diverse teaching strategies, can handle subjects outside their specialization more effectively. However, some teachers are hesitant, concerned that teaching unfamiliar subjects may affect the quality of education they provide.

This study seeks to assess the classroom experiences, coping mechanisms, and technical support provided to teachers in these situations. By proposing targeted learning interventions, the study aims to improve the work performance of teachers teaching outside their areas of expertise.

Statement of the Problem

The general problem of this study is: Classroom Experiences of Teachers Handling Subjects Beyond Their Area of Specialization. Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - a. Age
 - b. Sex

- c. Length of teaching experience
 - d. Specialized subject
2. What are the experiences of teachers handling subjects beyond their area of specialization?
 3. What are the coping mechanisms of teachers handling subjects beyond their specialization?
 4. What technical assistance is provided by the school heads to the teachers teaching subjects beyond their specialization?
 5. What learning and development intervention can be proposed to improve the work performance of teachers handling subjects beyond their area of specialization?

METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive-survey method to understand the work performance of teachers at Gallanosa National High School teaching subjects beyond their area of specialization. A questionnaire was employed for data collection, and statistical tools (frequency, percentage, and rank) were used to analyze the responses.

The sample consisted of 30 teachers, selected through purposive sampling. This technique ensured that only teachers who have experience teaching subjects outside their expertise were included.

The researcher sought approval from the school head and then distributed the questionnaires to the respondents, giving them a week to complete it. The researcher aimed for a 100% response rate and received guidance from an adviser to ensure proper survey administration. A statistician helped ensure the appropriate statistical analysis.

A researcher-made questionnaire was used, which was validated for reliability. The questionnaire had four parts: (1) the teachers’ profile, (2) their experiences with teaching outside their specialization, (3) coping mechanisms, and (4) technical assistance provided by school heads. The questionnaire was in checklist format, with sections for respondents to provide detailed experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following results were gathered, analyzed and interpreted by the researcher based on the objectives of the study.

Profile of Teachers teaching outside their expertise

The study presents a detailed analysis of the teacher-respondents’ profiles at Gallanosa National High School, focusing on sex, age, teaching experience, and field of specialization.

Table 1.1 Sex

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	8	27
Female	22	73
Total	30	100

The table 1.1 shown that the majority of the respondents were female (73%), with male teachers comprising only 27%. This gender imbalance reflects the broader trend in education, where women are more prevalent in the teaching profession. The higher number of female

teachers may contribute to a greater likelihood of them being assigned subjects outside their specialization, as they are often perceived to possess qualities like dedication and effective communication.

Table 1.2 Age of the Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
24 years old and below	7	23
25-35 years old	10	34
36-45 years old	6	20
46-55 years old	6	20
56 years old and above	1	3
Total	30	100

Table 1.2 shows that most teachers were in the 25-35 age group (34%), with 23% being 24 years old or younger. The age distribution suggests that younger teachers are more likely to take on subjects outside their expertise

due to their enthusiasm for professional growth and willingness to explore new areas. In contrast, older teachers may prefer to remain within their specialized fields, showing less interest in venturing into unfamiliar subjects.

Table 1.3 Teaching Experience of the Respondents

Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
4 years and below	7	23
5-9 years	13	43
10-19 years	5	17
20-29 years	3	10
30 years and above	2	7
Total	30	100

The data revealed that teachers with 5-9 years of experience made up the largest group (43%), followed by those with 4 years or less (23%). These teachers, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, are more inclined to explore teaching beyond their

specialization, motivated by curiosity and the desire for professional growth. On the other hand, teachers with extensive experience (10+ years) are more likely to stick to their areas of expertise.

Table 1.4 Field of Specialization of the Respondents

Field of Specialization	Frequency	Percentage (%)
TLE/HE	12	40
English	6	20
Others (Values Education)	6	20
Filipino	4	13
Science	2	7
Total	30	100

Table 1.4 shows that the largest group of teachers specialized in TLE/HE (40%), followed by English and Values Education specialists (20% each).

These subjects tend to be more versatile, with teachers in these fields frequently handling subjects outside their specialization. TLE/HE teachers, in particular, are expected to teach a wide range of practical skills, making cross-disciplinary teaching common.

Additionally, 2 or 7% of science teachers and 4 or 13% of Filipino specialists had prior experience teaching courses unrelated to their fields of expertise.

Experiences of Teachers Handling Subjects Beyond Their Area of Specialization

Exploring how teachers handle subjects outside their expertise involves looking at the challenges and opportunities they face.

This analysis focuses on understanding how teaching unfamiliar subjects impacts teachers, the strategies they use to overcome challenges, and how it affects student learning.

By studying data on teachers teaching beyond their expertise, one can learn what support and training they need to improve their teaching in various subjects.

Table 2. Experiences of Teachers Handling Subjects Beyond Their Area of Specialization

Experiences	Frequency	Rank
Adaptability: When teaching a subject outside of their area of expertise, teachers must be adaptable and willing to try different approaches to teaching the material.	28	1
Gratification: No matter how difficult teaching a subject outside of their area of expertise can be, it can also be a very rewarding experience.	26	2
Learning the Basics: When tasked with teaching a subject outside their area of expertise, teachers must first learn the basics.	25	3
Creative Problem-Solving: When teaching a subject outside of their area of expertise, teachers must be able to think creatively.	24	5
Working with Other Teachers: When teaching a subject outside of their area of expertise, teachers must also work with other teachers in the school.	24	5
Professional Development: Teaching a subject outside of their area of expertise can be a difficult task, and teachers need to keep up with professional development.	24	5
Time Management: When teachers are teaching a subject outside of their area of expertise, they must also be mindful of their time.	21	7.5
Patience: Teaching a subject outside of their area of expertise can be a difficult task, and it is important for teachers to be patient with their students.	21	7.5
Difficult Questions: No matter how prepared a teacher is for a lesson, there is always the possibility that a student will ask a question that they are not prepared to answer.	20	9.5
Understanding the Student's Perspective: Teaching a subject beyond their area of expertise can be difficult for teachers, as they may not be able to relate to the student's perspective.	20	9.5

Teaching subjects outside of one's area of specialization presents a blend of challenges and rewards. The study shows that teachers frequently experience the need for adaptability, as they must adjust their teaching methods to handle unfamiliar content effectively. This adaptability is crucial for ensuring that students receive quality education despite the teacher's lack of expertise in the subject.

The second most common experience is gratification, where teachers find immense satisfaction in seeing students grow and succeed, even when teaching topics, they are not experts in. This intrinsic motivation keeps educators engaged and willing to put in the extra effort required. Teachers also face the challenge of learning the basics of the subjects they teach, which helps them build a strong foundation for delivering accurate lessons. Creative problem-solving becomes essential as teachers must find innovative ways to simplify complex concepts and engage students.

Collaboration with fellow teachers is another key strategy, as it allows them to share insights and strategies, making it easier to tackle the challenges of teaching unfamiliar subjects. Professional development plays an important role in equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to improve their teaching in unfamiliar areas.

By attending workshops and pursuing further learning, teachers stay updated and enhance their effectiveness. Time management and patience are also vital skills, as teachers need to balance their additional responsibilities and address student questions with understanding and clarity. Despite the difficulties, teaching outside one's expertise often leads to rewarding experiences, including personal growth and stronger connections with students. Teachers' resilience and commitment to their students' learning are evident in the ways they navigate challenges and continue to deliver high-quality education. The findings emphasize the importance of adaptability, continuous learning, and collaboration in ensuring success when handling subjects beyond one's specialization.

Coping Mechanism of Teachers Handling Subjects Beyond Their Expertise.

Exploring how teachers cope with teaching subjects outside their expertise involves looking at the strategies they use, the support they seek, and how these coping methods affect their teaching and well-being. By studying their coping mechanisms, we can learn more about their resilience, adaptability, and professional development needs in handling this challenging situation.

Table 3. Coping Mechanism of Teachers Handling Subjects Beyond Their Expertise

Coping Mechanism	Frequency	Rank
Research: The first step a teacher should take when faced with a subject they are not familiar with is to do some research. By taking the time to understand the subject matter and familiarize themselves with the proper terminology, they can better understand the material and be more confident in their teaching.	28	1.5
Invest in professional development: Professional development courses and workshops are available to help teachers learn the content of the subject they are teaching. This investment in their professional development can help them become more confident in their teaching and help them better engage their students.	28	1.5
Seek out help: If the teacher is still feeling overwhelmed or uncertain, they should not hesitate to seek out assistance from their colleagues. It could be a fellow teacher in the same school, a professor at a nearby university, or an online tutor.	27	3.5
Use resources: The Internet, textbooks, and other resources can be invaluable tools for any teacher teaching a subject beyond their area of specialization. With the right materials and guidance, teachers can quickly gain an understanding of the material.	27	3.5
Take time to reflect: Teaching a subject that's outside of one's comfort zone can be overwhelming. Teachers should take the time to reflect on the material they are teaching and ask themselves how they can make it easier for their students to understand.	26	5.5
Don't be afraid to make mistakes: As a teacher, it's perfectly alright to make mistakes. Instead of viewing mistakes as failures, teachers should use them as learning opportunities.	26	5.5
Use creative teaching methods: When teaching a subject that's unfamiliar, teachers can use fun activities and creative teaching methods to engage their students and make the material easier to understand.	25	8
Implement strategies: Once they have reflected on the material and researched the subject, teachers should implement strategies to help their students better understand the material. They could use visual aids, engage in class discussions, and ask questions to stimulate critical thinking.	25	8
Believe in Oneself: The most important coping mechanism for a teacher teaching a subject beyond their area of specialization is to believe in themselves. With the right attitude and determination, any teacher can successfully teach a subject they are unfamiliar with.	25	8
Talk to the students: Teachers should talk to their students and ask them questions about the material. This will help them get a better understanding of their student's level of understanding and provide them with insights into how the material should be presented.	20	10

Teachers who are assigned to teach subjects outside their expertise employ a variety of coping mechanisms to navigate this challenge and maintain their effectiveness in the classroom. One of the most common strategies is conducting thorough research, which helps teachers understand unfamiliar subject matter, familiarize themselves with key concepts and terminology, and boost their confidence. Additionally, teachers often invest in professional development through workshops, courses, and conferences to gain specialized knowledge, stay updated, and increase their teaching competence. When feeling overwhelmed, teachers seek help from colleagues, mentors, or experts, which provides valuable insights and support. They also make use of available resources, such as textbooks and online materials, to deepen their understanding and

enhance lesson delivery. Reflecting on their teaching practices allows educators to simplify complex topics and improve their methods to better meet student needs. Teachers are also encouraged to view mistakes as learning opportunities, fostering resilience and adaptability in their teaching approach.

Creative teaching methods, such as interactive activities and visual aids, help make challenging content more engaging and accessible. Lastly, maintaining self-belief is crucial, as confidence in their ability to teach any subject empowers teachers to overcome challenges and adapt to unfamiliar material. Research and professional development stand out as the most vital coping strategies, as they equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully teach beyond their

expertise, ultimately improving their teaching experience and student outcomes.

Technical Assistance Provided by School Heads to Teachers Handling Subjects Beyond Their Specialization.

Analyzing the technical support given by school leaders to teachers handling subjects outside their expertise

involves looking at the guidance and assistance provided.

This analysis focuses on understanding the types of support offered, how effective they are, and their impact on teacher performance.

Table 4. Technical Assistance Provided by School Heads to Teachers Handling Subjects Beyond their Specialization

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	FREQUENCY	RANK
Developed a strategy: Heads of schools collaborated with teachers to create a plan that includes lesson plans, methods for assessing student understanding, and solutions for children who might struggle with the subject.	24	1
Connect with subject matter experts: School Heads facilitated connections with subject matter experts who can offer guidance and assistance.	22	2
Encouraged Collaboration: To help teachers better understand the subject, school administrators encouraged teachers to work with colleagues who have more experience in the subject.	21	3
Provided resources: school heads provide teachers with resources like subject-specific literature, internet resources, and opportunities for professional development.	20	4.5
Set expectations: School heads set expectations for teachers regarding the level of knowledge and competency required for the subject.	20	4.5
Established a support network: School heads established a network of support for teachers in the form of mentors, colleagues, and administrators who can provide guidance and assistance.	19	6
Monitored progress: School heads monitored the progress of teachers to ensure they were meeting the expectations set and standard.	18	7.5
Celebrated success: When a teacher reaches a significant teaching milestone, school heads acknowledge and celebrate their accomplishment.	18	7.5
Provided Feedback: Teachers received comments from school heads regarding their subject-matter instruction as well as recommendations for enhancement.	17	9
Encouraged professional growth: School heads encouraged and gave chances for professional growth, including webinars, seminars, workshops, and online courses.	16	10

The technical assistance provided by school heads to teachers handling subjects outside their specialization is crucial for ensuring effective teaching and maintaining academic standards.

The data revealed that the most frequent and effective form of support is collaborative planning, where school heads work with teachers to create comprehensive lesson plans and strategies.

Other key forms of support include connecting teachers with subject matter experts, encouraging collaboration with experienced colleagues, providing resources like literature and internet access, and setting clear expectations.

Additionally, school heads establish support networks, monitor progress, celebrate successes, offer feedback, and encourage professional growth through workshops and seminars.

This support helps teachers improve their teaching practices, build confidence, and enhance student outcomes.

The study emphasizes that teaching subjects outside one's expertise requires ongoing assistance from school leaders to ensure both teacher success and student achievement.

Proposed Intervention to Enhance Work Performance of Teachers Handling Subjects Beyond their Area of Specialization

The proposed intervention, entitled "Maximizing Teaching Effectiveness: Strategies for Teachers in Teaching Subjects Beyond their Specialization," aims to enhance the work performance of teachers assigned to subjects outside their area of expertise.

The intervention focuses on skill development, emotional support, and knowledge enhancement to help teachers adapt and perform effectively in these challenging situations. The program includes a 3-day seminar/workshop designed to provide teachers with strategies for lesson planning, teaching flexibility, teamwork, and reflective practices, as well as access to professional development resources.

The program will utilize a blended learning approach (online and face-to-face) and take place outside of regular school hours. It is aligned with the MATATAG curriculum and the objectives of the Philippine Development Plan to improve teacher competencies. The seminar's outcomes include improved teacher effectiveness, greater confidence, and better teaching practices in subjects beyond their specialization. Additionally, a school-based mentoring program will be implemented throughout the school year, focusing on identifying challenges, creating lesson plans, developing subject knowledge, and encouraging reflective practice. The intervention is designed to support teachers' professional growth and ensure continued quality education for students.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions drawn from the study highlight several key points. Most teachers at Gallanosa National High School who teach subjects outside their expertise are females aged 25-35, with 5-9 years of teaching experience, primarily specializing in TLE/HE. These teachers often face challenges such as adaptability, job satisfaction, and mastering the basics of the subjects they are teaching, which demonstrates their strong commitment to providing quality education and supporting student growth.

To manage these challenges, teachers engage in research, pursue professional development, seek guidance from colleagues or tutors, and make use of available resources. School heads provide essential technical support to these teachers by developing

strategies, connecting them with subject matter experts, and promoting collaboration among peers.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are made. First, promoting teacher collaboration through joint teaching sessions, lesson planning, and peer observations can enhance their skills and provide mutual support. Offering mentoring to those teaching outside their expertise is also crucial in providing ongoing guidance. Additionally, fostering a flexible educational culture and recognizing teachers who take on subjects outside their specialization can encourage others to be more open to such challenges. It is recommended to offer continuous professional development opportunities through workshops and training sessions to boost teachers' confidence and teaching effectiveness. Lastly, implementing the proposed seminar, "Maximizing Teaching Effectiveness: Strategies for Educators in Teaching Beyond Their Specialization," would provide targeted support to improve teachers' work performance, equipping them with the necessary competencies to meet diverse student needs even when teaching subjects outside their specialization.

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