



## Research Article

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# OUT-OF-FIELD TEACHING: ENGLISH TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES

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### Abstract

The quality of teachers is a contributing factor to success in any educational endeavor. It is therefore important to address specific concerns and provide appropriate professional development support, especially to teachers who are given teaching assignments outside of their field of specialization. This phenomenon is observed especially for those teaching in senior high school during the onset of the K to 12 curriculum implementation adding two years (senior high school) of basic education in the country. This study explores the out-of-field teaching experiences and practices of senior high school English teachers in selected public schools in Cebu province. This qualitative research utilized in-depth interviews in generating themes and describing the meaning of the experiences through the lenses of English teachers. The findings of the study highlighted their experiences in handling subjects outside their area of specialization; their teaching practices to cope with the lack of skills, strategies and content knowledge to handle these subjects; and the professional development learning activities afforded to them. Understanding the meaning of these experiences would help administrators effectively manage out-of-field teaching situations and provide relevant support strategies for these teachers. Moreover, district, division and regional personnel may consider the diverse out-of-field teachers' learning needs in general while developing professional development programs.

**Keywords:** English Teachers, K to 12 Implementation, Out-of-field Teaching, Senior High School, Teaching Experiences

## Introduction

The Department of Education (DepEd) envisions its 21st-century Filipino learners to master their skills and concepts and equipping with core values and lifelong competencies for nation-building and societal development. That is why a basic education curriculum was signed into law by President Benigno Aquino III that relinquished 2 additional years in secondary basic education topping the old curriculum with only 10 years of quality education provision. The goal of adopting the internal standards will perhaps provide more opportunities and better horizons to all learners being equipped with life skills and a “glocal” way of thinking. Along with its mandatory implementation, the K-12 Basic Education Program harnessed all aspects of the new education system where new buildings and facilities were provided having the local government units as primary external education stakeholders, re-introduced Technical and Vocational education in secondary public and private schools, improved subject areas with the provision of better learning resources and even hired qualified teachers in realizing the department’s mission and vision through the program.

The need of enhancing the program arose when the Philippines was found as one of the three remaining nations worldwide practicing 10 years of basic education, highlighted in Policy Brief Senate Economic Planning Office in the article entitled, K to 12: Quality Education Key For the learners to globally competitive, the department overhauled its curriculum in an international scale or the global village, making the program as the key to the nation’s development and improvement. With the “No Child Left Behind Policy” of the country, every child is afforded quality basic education and schools have to accommodate the increasing number of enrollees every year.

Further, the teachers, as key implementers of the program, play a vital role in transferring the curriculum’s competencies into reality and actualizing what is embedded or mandated. Hence, DepEd puts high qualification standards on its filtering of teacher-applicants. For teachers in senior high school, an applicant must have at least 15 units in their master’s degree or must have undergone relevant training specializing in the subject/s to be handled in the specialized tracks. In the Technical-Vocational and Livelihood track, a National TVET Trainer Certificate (NTTC) or Trainers Methodology Certificate (TMC) of at least 1 level higher of the subjects taught is needed for teachers who wish to teach in the senior high. Certificates for any respectable and highly regarded local and national organizations and preferably with two years of teaching experience in all the K-12 tracks are expected from them. A teaching license is also needed but those applicants who graduated with non-education courses and worked in the industries for 2 or more years are required to pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) within the 5 years.

However, there have been considerable challenges felt by teachers at the onset of the implementation. For instance, DepEd has not met the target number of teachers to teach in senior high school. This resulted in junior high school teachers being transferred to senior high school or if not given senior high school teaching load when those who come from different industries specializing in the different tracks should have taught these subjects (Bacus et al., 2022). The shortage of qualified teachers further leads to teachers who were teaching subjects that are not their field of specialization.

Out-of-field teaching is described as a phenomenon wherein instructors facilitate learning areas having less training and education (Ingersoll, 1999). Seastrom et al., (2002), recollect out-of-discipline teachers to be those without a primary, minor and certification in a subject taught. The out-of-field phenomenon arises due to several factors as mentioned above and supported by that in the study of Ingersoll (2002) and Hobbs and Porsch (2021). Among these reasons are teacher shortages, insufficient school budgets, unequal and inequities in teacher distribution due to policies surrounding tenure and teacher choice, scheduling issues in schools, inadequate teacher training programs, few incentives for training and or recruiting and the teacher education system in several countries where teachers are trained as specialists and not as generalists among others. As these teachers teach outside of their field of study or expertise, this makes the need for content area professional development crucial to their success (Ingersoll, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al, 2017). The study of Du Plessis (2020) also provided insights into the difficulties experienced by unsuitably qualified teachers when they teach STEM subjects in particular. This is also supported by Hobbs and Porsch (2021) that teachers primarily are prompted by the need to learn new content and strategies which requires considerable time and effort which these teachers do not have which ultimately leads to implications, especially in teacher self-efficacy. Although administrators know that the answer to this concern is to increase the supply and fairly distribute qualified teachers to schools, this will take time (Prince & O'Connor, 2018), so the teachers in the system need support and substantial opportunities for learning (Hobbs & Porsch, 2021). This is critical since the highly qualified teachers may experience burnout and become highly unqualified if they are made to teach subjects with little to no training at all (Talingting, 2019).

Furthermore, English teachers were the most numbered applicants in the Department of Education designated to teach subjects that were not language and grammar-related subjects in all tracks of Senior High School, giving them a huge challenge in their passion for the chosen profession. To address this concern, DepEd sent teachers to specialized mass training for teachers for them to be aware of the different subjects offered in the specialized tracks, the requirements for students to finish the chosen tracks and input on content and strategies for these subjects. However, another concern mentioned by these English teachers is the lack of learning resources for these subjects. For instance, in science-related subjects where facilities were provided but were supervised by English teachers, huge difficulty was experienced in managing science activities due to a lack of training on the usage and functions of each laboratory apparatus. In mathematics, higher concepts in different equations and functions in Probability and Statistics classes caused these English teachers' sleepless nights. As teacher education institutions produce more English major graduates, they are likely to experience out-of-field teaching which later on, if not addressed, may compromise education outcomes.

While there is a need to ensure an adequate supply of qualified teachers, administrators and education leaders also need to understand the implications of out-of-field teaching and the challenges faced by these teachers who are currently filling these roles. Thus, this study explored the experiences and practices of English teacher-specialists teaching other subjects in the Senior High School in select public high schools in

Cebu province. The results of this study may be able to shed light on how administrators manage and formulate solutions to address this pressing concern.

## **Research Objective**

This study explores the experiences of out-of-field senior high school English teachers. It specifically seeks to answer the following: What are the experiences of the English teachers handling other subjects? What are the practices employed by these out-of-field English teachers?

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research design because it allows for the exploration and comprehension of how people or groups interpret the human condition or a societal issue (Creswell, 2009; Seidman, 2006). This qualitative research obtains a descriptive approach as it seeks to understand thoroughly relevant experiences of English teacher-specialists in teaching other subjects in the senior high school.

### **Research Participants and Instrument**

The researcher participants were the ten English teacher-specialists in senior high schools in one district in Cebu province. These participants were purposively chosen as they are the identified graduates of Education majoring in English who were given teaching loads that are not related to their field of specialization. These subjects may be core, applied, or specialized learning areas that they have handled for two to three years other than English-related subjects. Adhering to the principles of data saturation, the redundancy of the data was observed in the ninth participant and the researchers added one more to ensure that no new information is discovered in the data analysis. The researchers were viewed as the primary tool for data gathering and analysis in this qualitative study. Moreover, the researchers also used a validated interview guide which was used during the semi-structured face-to-face interview with the research participants. After sending a letter of intent to the school heads and consent to the participants, the interview commenced with the preferred schedule of the teacher-participants. A recorder was used, upon their permission, in the interview that lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. Recorded data were then transcribed and the respondents were asked to confirm every documented response. The consolidated data from the number of respondents were treated thematically.

### **Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations**

In getting relevant results out from this qualitative-descriptive study, thematic analysis is utilized. The six steps advanced by Braun and Clarke (2006) in doing a thematic evaluation are respectively observed in

this study. An extensive evaluation of themes was done following the steps of familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up. An ethics clearance has been sought before the conduct of the study. The researchers have adhered to the ethical principles of confidentiality, anonymity, non-maleficence and beneficence throughout the conduct of the study.

## Results and Discussion

To ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were hereby used. The presentation of this section is guided by the following sub-problems: What are the experiences of the English teachers handling other subjects? What are the practices employed by these out-of-field English teachers?

### Teachers' Experiences in Handling Subjects

This presents the extent to which participants felt upon handling subjects they never master in their undergraduate or graduate studies. All the participants shared mixed or different sets of emotions as seen in the following themes being in a situation where unarmed teachers had to carry out highly contextualized competencies.

**Table 1** Teachers' experiences along with different lesson phases

Sub-problem:	Themes	Discussion
Teachers' experiences in handling subjects	Preparation of Lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out-of-field teachers emphasized the need of being sufficient with content knowledge to be able to deliver competencies of the subjects handled.</li> <li>• Participants shared emotions when out-of-field subjects were handed over as assignment loads.</li> <li>• Teachers enumerated how they prepared lessons in daily teaching yet they felt compromising quality learning due to their insufficiency or inadequacy.</li> </ul>
	Presentation of Lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out-of-field teachers presented how they executed simple and complicated competencies for a subject.</li> <li>• They shared the importance of the components of teaching and learning efficacy, and knowledge of instructional strategies particularly.</li> <li>• The English teachers who do out-of-field teaching feel inadequately prepared to teach or present unspecialized subjects because they were not trained to teach those.</li> </ul>

Sub-problem:	Themes	Discussion
Accessibility to resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers stated teaching would be easier with appropriate and functional teaching instructional materials and references.</li> <li>Teachers expressed how they scavenged materials anywhere, district library, or coming from their connections and fellow teachers in the department around the district.</li> </ul>	

### Preparation of Lessons

Being prepared in daily discussions is a constant effort, especially for those who are handling subjects other than their field of expertise. On the other side, being unprepared also to daily encounters with the learners is compromising the quality of education they ought to learn. It is common knowledge that the expertise of the content knowledge is essential for the delivery of learning. According to Grossman (1990), the expertise of the discipline includes understanding the content material. Moreso, the teacher-participants' content material expertise appears to be insufficient to address such challenges, making them experience unpreparedness and the primary cause of their emotions. Various responses were given and recorded from the participants of the study on their teaching experiences, given the fact that most of them do not have any formal academic training in learning areas assigned to them aside from their specialization, making them less prepared for their daily lessons. Teacher M, even with nine years of teaching experience in junior high school, expressed that she was overwhelmed that she will be teaching pre-collegiate competencies or lessons that are not related to her specialization. She said, *"I was shocked and nervous when those subjects were handed over to me, I was afraid knowing that I don't have a background or schematic knowledge on the topics to be discussed."* Teacher T also mentioned, *"I wanted to complain, but you are left with no choice since the need arises. Though I am not qualified, I need to do my best. It was scary."*

Doubts and hesitations were the significant feelings or reactions experienced by these teachers thinking that the lack of knowledge about the subjects makes them struggle in achieving the subject outcomes. A few of these teachers considered out-of-field teaching a burden, an agony to bear, and an endeavor a teacher should carry throughout the semester. Darling-Hammond and Youngs (2002) stated that the student achievement gains are much more influenced by a student's assigned teacher than other factors like class size and class composition. There is little to emulate or influence when the teacher herself struggles to face the learners in her daily discussions. Teacher D in her first year of service in the public senior high school recounted,

*“It was a burden for me, leading the blinds with a blind. The line “fake it until you make it” becomes my line every semester I am handling non-English subjects. Even with my own purchased books, I hardly decipher some terminologies in the subject, leaving me to skip the difficult competencies and I kept worrying for an evaluation on my teaching performance that many would criticize my work.”*

Executing or concretizing the most essential learning competency to each learning area is the first and foremost responsibility of a classroom teacher. Aspiring English teachers specialized in one area during their bachelor’s degree to be better equipped. Teaching what has been practiced and studied in four years would enable an educator to deliver the competencies effectively and look for relevant strategies to be utilized to achieve the learning outcomes. However, this is not the case for out-of-field English teachers. All ten English teacher-participants expressed that they always felt unprepared.

#### **Presentation of Lessons**

Out-of-field teachers carry out lessons or competencies in the ways they knew how. However, for these teachers, they have been carrying the feeling of inadequacy. They expressed that their little knowledge in delivering the lessons could not suffice or satisfy the hunger of the students for learning. The feeling of inadequacy especially in content knowledge of these specialized subjects has prompted most of them to choose from the set of competencies, carrying out only a few competencies from what should be expected. For instance, Teacher R, being an English teacher, insists that Math is difficult for her. She has difficulty simplifying calculations for her students and admits that this has affected her self-efficacy and confidence. She also knew that this would have implications later on for students taking Math-related programs in college. She added,

*“There is one part in the conduct of quantitative research where students have to compute the measures of central tendency. In the absence of technology, both I and the students have to learn the lesson manually or traditionally. I didn’t do Statistics so much, so I have a little bit of a problem when it comes to computation especially those with complicated formulas. Yes, but I am still struggling in the part of statistical treatment because it has a lot of calculations.”*

On the other hand, Teacher B sees no good in where she is now, being a neophyte in the teaching field, with limited teaching strategies for subjects she did not learn in her bachelor’s degree. She is afraid that her students will learn something not factual or essential in the subject she is handling, and they would carry these mistakes throughout their student’s life. She shared,

*“Aside from the difficulty to choose for a particular strategy to be used, another thing I worry about is for my students to learn wrong information and will live that information throughout their learning journey. I don’t want to be blamed in the future because I taught something wrong to them. Though this allowed me to learn the subject, how to teach the subject, and an additional skill and knowledge. But my doubt made the situation worse, for what knowledge a student gets out from a doubtful teacher.”*

These out-of-field English teachers believed that their inadequacy to teach the subjects would greatly affect the students. Thus, in their ways, they have tried to capacitate themselves through online tutorials or seek help from their co-teachers.

### **Accessibility to Resources**

Looking for appropriate means and educational materials to be utilized is a paramount concern of out-of-field teachers. Poor teaching strategy, limited content knowledge, and limited resources made some of these out-of-field teachers anticipate negative results in the learning outcomes. These teachers shared a common dilemma regarding the limited resources afforded to them. Due to most subjects being new, there were few materials that teachers can access. This becomes more challenging for teachers who are not content experts. One teacher mentioned that he could not give the appropriate activities and even strategies required or expected from the subject with limited resources provided. Most teachers recounted that there were no printed materials provided. This could have somehow lessened their preparation time. Teachers still need to look for the right resources, study the content, and decide on the strategy among others. However, even with these difficulties, teachers are resilient. They shared that these difficulties in most cases are also learning experiences for them. They believed that all teachers grapple with the changes in the new curriculum and so complaining may not be a good option. Teachers find ways to address the concerns they are facing, spend personal resources, and allocated time and considerable effort to make things done. Teacher J expressed,

*“The new learning you can get out from the new subject will allow you to grow and become a better educator over the years. What I usually do before stepping inside the four walls of a classroom, is I study, research from right resources, pray and deliver.”*

### **Practices Employed by out-of-field English teachers**

These out-of-field English teachers go out of their way to be able to deliver the content in the most effective way they can.

**Table 2** Out-of-field English teachers’ practices

Sub-problem	Themes	Discussion
Practices employed by out-of-field teachers	Contextualizing content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English teachers use and relate their understanding of language concepts to concepts in the subject they are teaching.</li> <li>They considered materials available in the locality where students are accustomed could be a huge help to aid in facilitating learning.</li> </ul>
	Emphasizing content over performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers emphasized the importance of content knowledge in these specialized subjects and thus spend more time breaking down complex ideas</li> <li>Teachers encouraged students to research and study in advance and share ideas</li> </ul>
	Embracing mentorship and assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Out-of-field teachers shared the need to reach out to others for help which never makes teachers less qualified to teach, that, asking for technical assistance is necessary for every field of work</li> </ul>

### Contextualizing Content

Teachers create an understanding of language and/or concepts by using materials such as actual objects and gestures and basing the competencies on the level of understanding of students. English teachers use and relate their understanding of language concepts to concepts in the subject they are teaching. Grossman (1990) purported that context standard knowledge will be used alongside students’ context and background. Understanding the context of the students and knowing their background, strengths, weaknesses and even families are significant in learning delivery. All teacher-participants emphasized the significance of instructional strategies and content knowledge in any core, applied, or specialized subject. The study also found that the students’ contextualization elevates their level of understanding of students and better the experiences in teaching content, strategies and skills. Prior knowledge, it has been shown that instruction with contextualized content can activate learners’ prior knowledge and promote more effective problem solving (Krause et.al., 2016). Contextualization happens when teachers relate concepts to meaning and relevant context. This helps learners build meaning and connection to what has been taught in the classroom to their authentic experiences. The teacher-respondents shared,

*“I needed to adapt to the trends according to their age so students will listen to my discussion. I localized my examples and materials for better retention of the topic.”*

Profiling and getting to know students; their strengths and weaknesses, and likes and dislikes, help these out-of-field teacher tailor their discussion and strategies to what students need. Teachers employ differentiated instruction and integrate technology among others.

### **Emphasizing Content over Performance**

Students in senior high school are supposed to learn content or the most essential learning competencies in all learning areas. Moreover, actualizing or concretizing specific learning objectives can be done through performance or product assessment. Both content standards and performance standards are essential in the implementation and assessment of the K-12 curriculum. However, the highlighted responses proved that teachers emphasized more on the content over product and performance. Few of them mentioned that since most of their time is spent analyzing and studying the content, they tend to dwell more on students having to understand these concepts. They seldom give product and performance assessments to students as according to the teachers,

*“We have spent much time studying the content so we have to deliver it. Sometimes there is no more time on thinking of what students will do with the content. Checking and spending more time in students' performance tasks take a lot of time and we do not have that considering that we have more than 2 preparations and most of these are not our specialization.”*

Content is more emphasized by these out-of-field teachers since they are still discovering or exploring each lesson before they could think of how students would apply what is taught. In most scenarios, daily discussions of facilitating specific content knowledge do not necessarily mean that the teacher masters the topic. Sometimes, it means that the teacher is also trying to understand what he is discussing. Most of these teacher-participants emphasized the need for them to tackle first the content of the course of the subject for them to share knowledge and at the same time, solicit ideas from their learners before allowing students to perform.

Moreover, one English teacher who is assigned to teach Science knew that the learning area requires him to do experiments and exploration. However, despite the availability of a Science laboratory, Teacher T's capability of executing competencies that require experimentation or performance in Science limits him and the class to perform more in the subject. Sheperd (2013) additionally recognizes the importance of deep expertise in the content subject but highlights the instructor's ability to make that content material effortlessly reachable to students.

### **Embracing Mentorship and Assistance**

This academic activity happens when one teacher asks for technical assistance and guidance to develop or turn a particular weak field into something positive. Allowing or exercising mentorship or mentor-mentee relationship is a good manifestation of a growing and healthy institution. This does not only happen between a school head/master teacher to teacher but also to those who are out-of-field and specialized teachers. Some participants received a great amount of support from their school heads and master teachers

and all reported that these mentorship sessions helped them a lot of as out-of-field teachers. Teacher T stated,

*“I asked help from my co-teacher especially when it is her field of specialization. I did not hesitate to approach teachers to ask for better strategies in carrying out competencies. I also borrow some references and learning materials. I also let other teachers explain concepts where I found difficulty understanding which helped.”*

Asking for technical assistance is not limited to the school level only. For schools that do not have specialized teachers, one can reach out to other districts to ask for help. As one teacher recounted,

*“I tried to consult a Physics teacher from another school before because he was known to be knowledgeable of the subject in the district. Yes, our situation is hard but teachers always do their best for the students.”*

Initiatives like the Learning Action Cell (LAC) Sessions of the DepEd also helped in identifying issues and concerns of teachers. Teacher D shared,

*“Asking for strategies and best practices to some teachers is done during our LAC Session, this would give us the chance to solicit or list some best practices employed by some specialized teachers that we can use being an out-of-field teacher. We listen also from the experiences of some tenured teachers and formulate means that can better our classroom discussion with their best practices.”*

However, some of these teachers also expressed that professional development activities afforded are not need-based. Some teachers also felt that because they are experienced teachers, it was just expected that they did not need support. They mentioned that they should be given time to unwrap the curriculum and explore strategies that will benefit the students they are to teach. For them to be successful, they must be afforded the right support. Mentors and mentees (that is the specialized and the out-of-field teacher) must have time to observe and be observed regularly. Mentees must be able to observe expert teachers who are skilled in the same content area. Administrators must provide time for mentors and out-of-field teachers to meet and have meaningful discourse about their observations. Out-of-field teachers would also benefit from observations and feedback at the district level from curriculum coaches and department heads. Educators, especially those teaching out-of-field, need training that is intense, focused, and content-oriented. They require ongoing training and close monitoring of professional development strategies to ensure that those strategies are implemented with fidelity so that students and teachers experience success. Teachers seek to be the experts in all their content. They want extensive training that focuses on content standards. Teachers also want professional development that coincides with the district curriculum and collaboration of those goals. Out-of-field teachers stated that in addition, they learn in pre-arranged collaborative conferences which also train certain topics at the senior high school. Moreover, mentoring becomes advantageous to big schools in the provincial areas and disadvantageous to some. Big schools have more master teachers who can provide technical assistance and do mentoring sessions for teachers in their departments. However, other

small schools do not have this opportunity. Strategies to address this should also be laid down by the school leaders.

As has been previously noted, success and achievements are the primary purpose and mission of any school for its students. Improving student achievement should be the direct goal of all issued support. The person who is ultimately responsible for this task is the facilitator of knowledge, the educator. The knowledge of the teacher of a specific learning area is the determining factor in improving learning outcomes. Substantial evidence shows that teacher qualification is linked to student achievement. Out-of-field teachers require rigorous training if they are going to be assigned to teach classes for which they are not qualified. These teachers teach outside of their field of study or expertise; this makes the need for content area professional development crucial to their success (Ingersoll, 2002, Darling-Hammond, et.al., 2017). Schools must take this phenomenon seriously and remedy the situation as this has long-term implications for student success.

## Conclusion

The experiences shared during interviews with ten out-of-field English highlighted the strong need for professional development that aligns with the work that teachers do in the classroom. Educators, especially those teaching out-of-field, need intense training, focused, and content-oriented. Compromising the quality of teaching and learning processes may result from inadequacy and insufficiency of teachers in handling the subjects not vertical to their field of specialization. Based on the results, insufficiency and low efficacy were experienced by these teachers with limited content and pedagogical knowledge which they believed have hampered them to deliver quality student outcomes. The study also presented the need for these out-of-field English teachers to attend constant and relevant professional development programs at the school, district, division, or regional level.

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