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Research Article

Lived Experiences of Out-of-Field Teachers: A Narrative Inquiry in Philippine Secondary Schools

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Abstract
This study investigated the experiences of mathematics teachers assigned to teach subjects outside their area of specialization in the Schools Division of Kabankalan City. Out-of-field teaching has remained a significant educational concern because it creates a mismatch between teachers' academic preparation and instructional responsibilities, potentially affecting instructional quality, teacher confidence, and professional effectiveness. The study employed a qualitative narrative research design involving six purposively selected mathematics teachers who had experienced out-of-field teaching assignments. Data were collected through an Individual Interview Form containing open-ended questions and were analyzed using the Personal Experience Narrative Framework and thematic analysis. The findings revealed three major challenges encountered by the participants: limited content knowledge of unfamiliar subjects, reduced confidence in teaching outside their specialization, and inadequate instructional resources. Despite these challenges, the participants demonstrated resilience by seeking professional instructional support from colleagues, fostering collaborative teacher–student learning, and maximizing available educational resources. These adaptive strategies enabled them to perform their instructional responsibilities while promoting continuous professional growth. The study concludes that strengthening institutional support, mentoring initiatives, and targeted professional development programs is essential for enhancing the competence and confidence of out-of-field teachers. It further recommends expanding teacher support systems, improving access to instructional resources, and promoting collaborative professional learning to strengthen instructional effectiveness and teacher development.

Keywords
out-of-field teaching, mathematics teachers, narrative inquiry, professional development, coping strategies

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The authors contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, and supervision. The authors approved the final manuscript.
Ethics Statement
This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education systems continue to experience increasing demands for qualified teachers who possess strong disciplinary expertise while remaining responsive to evolving curricular reforms and institutional priorities. One persistent challenge confronting education systems worldwide is out-of-field teaching, a practice in which teachers are assigned to teach subjects beyond their formal academic preparation or professional specialization. Although this practice is commonly implemented to address teacher shortages, staffing imbalances, and curriculum requirements, it may adversely affect instructional quality, teacher confidence, professional identity, and instructional effectiveness. International evidence has demonstrated that out-of-field teaching extends beyond workforce concerns by influencing teachers' capacity to adapt to unfamiliar disciplines, develop subject-specific competence, and sustain quality instruction. Comparative studies have further emphasized that institutional support and continuous professional learning are essential in mitigating the challenges associated with out-of-field teaching across diverse educational contexts (Badaru & Ndlovu, 2025; Hobbs, 2020; Hobbs et al., 2022; Hobbs & Porsch, 2022). Consequently, understanding the experiences of out-of-field teachers has become increasingly important for informing educational policy and strengthening teacher development initiatives.

Within the Philippine educational context, ongoing educational reforms and workforce challenges continue to influence teacher deployment and instructional assignments (UNESCO, 2024). As a result, many public secondary school teachers are assigned to teach subjects outside their academic specialization to address staffing demands and ensure curriculum implementation. Such assignments often require teachers to perform instructional responsibilities for which they have limited disciplinary preparation, thereby creating additional professional demands. Philippine studies have reported that out-of-field teaching presents significant instructional, psychological, and professional challenges that require continuous institutional support, mentoring, and professional development (Evardo, 2024; Hobbs & Quinn, 2021). Moreover, evidence indicates that continuous professional learning and advanced graduate education contribute to improved workplace performance, instructional competence, and professional effectiveness among educators, reinforcing the importance of sustained capacity-building initiatives for teachers who encounter diverse instructional responsibilities (Alfaras et al., 2026). In the Schools Division of Kabankalan City, mathematics teachers have likewise been assigned to teach subjects such as Physical Science, Media and Information Literacy, Entrepreneurship, Research, and Personal Development despite having formal preparation in mathematics education. These instructional assignments highlight the realities of out-of-field teaching within the local educational context and underscore the need to understand how teachers respond to responsibilities beyond their disciplinary expertise.

Although previous studies have examined the prevalence, policy implications, and educational consequences of out-of-field teaching, much of the existing literature has focused on broad educational contexts rather than the lived experiences of mathematics teachers in Philippine public secondary schools (Hobbs & Törner, 2019; Hobbs et al., 2022). Recent reviews have likewise emphasized the need for context-specific investigations that examine how teachers experience, interpret, and respond to out-of-field teaching across different educational settings (Badaru & Ndlovu, 2025). While qualitative studies have explored the experiences of out-of-field teachers in selected Philippine contexts (Evardo, 2024), and recent evidence has synthesized the challenges encountered by secondary out-of-field teachers in the country (Javier et al., 2026), a contextual and methodological gap remains. Existing Philippine studies have primarily employed phenomenological approaches or evidence synthesis, whereas limited research has utilized narrative inquiry to examine how mathematics teachers construct meaning from their out-of-field teaching experiences in local public secondary schools, particularly within the Schools Division of Kabankalan City. Addressing this gap is expected to generate context-specific evidence that deepens understanding of teachers' professional experiences and informs the development of responsive support mechanisms that strengthen teacher competence, well-being, and instructional effectiveness (Quinn & Hobbs, 2025).

This study investigates the narratives of mathematics teachers serving as out-of-field secondary teachers in the Schools Division of Kabankalan City. Specifically, it examines the challenges they experienced, the coping strategies they employed, and the institutional support needed to strengthen their professional competence and instructional effectiveness. The findings are expected to contribute to educational leadership, teacher professional development, and evidence-informed policy by providing contextual insights that may guide the development of sustainable support systems for out-of-field teachers. Furthermore, the study is expected to enrich the growing body of literature on out-of-field teaching by offering empirical evidence from a local Philippine context, thereby informing future research and educational practices aimed at improving teacher preparation, professional learning, and instructional quality.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study employed a qualitative narrative research design to explore the lived experiences of mathematics teachers assigned to teach subjects outside their field of specialization. Narrative inquiry was selected because it enabled the researcher to examine participants' personal stories and understand how they interpreted their experiences in out-of-field teaching assignments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design was appropriate because it facilitated an in-depth exploration of teachers' challenges, coping strategies, and professional growth through their personal narratives. The study was grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which recognizes that individuals construct meanings from their lived experiences within specific social and educational contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Locale

The study was conducted in the Schools Division of Kabankalan City, Negros Occidental, Philippines. The research focused on selected public secondary schools located in Districts I, IV, and V, where mathematics teachers had been assigned teaching

responsibilities beyond their academic specialization. The locale was selected because out-of-field teaching assignments were prevalent within the division, providing an appropriate context for examining the experiences of mathematics teachers who encountered this educational phenomenon.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who possessed rich and relevant experiences related to out-of-field teaching (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Six mathematics teachers participated in the study. Participants were required to (1) be mathematics majors employed in public secondary schools within the Schools Division of Kabankalan City, (2) have at least three years of teaching experience, and (3) have been assigned to teach one or more subjects outside their field of specialization. Two participants were selected from each of Districts I, IV, and V. The sample size was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to obtain detailed narratives while facilitating an in-depth analysis of recurring experiences across participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected through an Individual Interview Form (IIF) composed of open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' experiences as out-of-field teachers. The interview guide focused on the challenges encountered, coping strategies employed, and professional growth experienced by the participants. Because of logistical constraints, the participants completed the interview forms remotely and submitted their responses in English. Prior to data collection, the research instrument underwent expert validation by specialists in mathematics and English education to establish content validity. A pilot implementation involving teachers with similar experiences was also conducted to improve the clarity, organization, and relevance of the interview questions before the actual data collection.

Analysis

The PEN Framework served as the initial analytical guide by organizing each participant's narrative according to its structural elements, namely Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Resolution, Evaluation, and Coda. This process preserved the sequence, context, and meaning of participants' lived experiences before cross-case comparisons were undertaken. After the individual narratives were organized using the PEN Framework, thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and generate broader themes that represented the shared challenges and coping strategies of mathematics teachers assigned outside their field of specialization. Accordingly, the PEN Framework guided the narrative organization, whereas thematic analysis facilitated the development of cross-participant themes.

Reflexivity

The researcher practiced reflexivity throughout the investigation to minimize personal assumptions and potential biases during data collection and interpretation. Bracketing techniques were employed to allow participants' narratives to emerge naturally while reducing the influence of the researcher's prior experiences and expectations. Participants were encouraged to describe their experiences openly, and probing questions were used to clarify meanings without directing their responses. These procedures strengthened the credibility and authenticity of the qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed of the purpose, procedures, and expected outcomes of the study before providing their consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms, and all responses were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. Participants retained the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences.

Limitations and Rigor

The study focused exclusively on six mathematics teachers from selected public secondary schools in the Schools Division of Kabankalan City. Consequently, the findings were intended to provide an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences rather than statistical generalizations to a broader population. To enhance methodological rigor, the researcher employed expert validation of the interview guide, pilot testing, member checking, triangulation of information, systematic thematic analysis, and careful documentation of the analytical process. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and trustworthiness of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented according to the research questions and are organized into two major sections: (1) the challenges experienced by mathematics teachers assigned to teach subjects outside their area of specialization and (2) the coping strategies they employed to address these challenges. The discussion integrates the participants' narratives with relevant literature to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the findings.

Challenges Encountered by Mathematics Teachers as Out-of-Field Secondary Teachers

The thematic analysis identified three major challenges experienced by mathematics teachers who were assigned to subjects outside their academic specialization. These themes reflected the participants' instructional experiences and illustrated the demands associated with out-of-field teaching. Table 1 presents the three major challenges encountered by mathematics teachers who were assigned to teach outside their area of specialization. The findings indicated that out-of-field teaching affected not only teachers' content knowledge but also their instructional confidence and access to appropriate teaching resources.

Table 1
Themes on the Challenges Experienced by Mathematics Teachers as Out-of-Field Secondary Teachers

Theme	Representative Participant Statement
Lack of Basic Knowledge on What and How to Teach	"One significant challenge is the need to thoroughly study and understand the material before presenting it to students..." – Teacher Ellipses
Lack of Confidence in Teaching the Subject	"Teaching a subject outside of my area of expertise might make me less confident..." – Teacher Radius
Lack of Available Resources to Be Used in Class	"Handling Research subjects was particularly difficult due to the lack of readily available resources..." – Teacher Pi

Theme 1. Lack of Basic Knowledge on What and How to Teach

The participants consistently reported that limited content knowledge was their greatest challenge when teaching unfamiliar subjects. Since their academic preparation focused primarily on mathematics education, they were required to devote additional time to studying unfamiliar concepts before classroom instruction. This increased preparation often resulted in heavier workloads and greater instructional anxiety.

Teacher Ellipses explained: "One significant challenge is the need to thoroughly study and understand the material before presenting it to students, especially when their existing knowledge may sometimes surpass my own."

The findings indicated that participants' limited disciplinary knowledge substantially increased lesson preparation time and heightened instructional anxiety. Similar experiences have been documented among out-of-field teachers, who frequently assume responsibility for unfamiliar subject content while maintaining expected instructional standards (Hobbs, 2020). Likewise, international evidence has shown that inadequate disciplinary preparation limits teachers' confidence and instructional effectiveness, particularly in contexts where institutional support is limited (Badaru & Ndlovu, 2025). Philippine evidence also demonstrated that teachers assigned outside their specialization often experience similar instructional difficulties while independently acquiring unfamiliar content knowledge (Evardo, 2024). Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of discipline-specific professional development and mentoring before assigning teachers to unfamiliar subject areas.

Theme 2. Lack of Confidence in Teaching the Subject

Participants also reported reduced confidence when teaching subjects beyond their academic preparation. They expressed uncertainty regarding lesson delivery and experienced anxiety when responding to students' questions, particularly when the discussions extended beyond their existing knowledge.

Teacher Radius shared: "Teaching a subject outside of my area of expertise might also make me less confident, which can influence how well I teach and how credible I come across to students and colleagues."

The narratives revealed that confidence was closely associated with teachers' disciplinary preparation and familiarity with the assigned subject. Participants expressed uncertainty regarding lesson delivery and classroom interactions when teaching outside their specialization. Similar findings have shown that out-of-field teaching often diminishes teachers' perceived instructional capacity and professional confidence (Hobbs & Quinn, 2021). Recent reviews likewise emphasized that strengthening institutional support, mentoring, and collaborative professional learning significantly improves teachers' confidence and adaptation to unfamiliar teaching assignments (Badaru & Ndlovu, 2025). These findings highlight the importance of sustained professional support in enhancing instructional effectiveness among out-of-field teachers.

Theme 3. Lack of Available Educational Resources

Another major challenge involved the limited availability of instructional resources needed to facilitate effective teaching. Participants described difficulties in obtaining reference materials, laboratory equipment, internet connectivity, and other educational resources that supported lesson preparation and classroom instruction.

Teacher Pi explained: "Handling Research subjects was particularly difficult due to the lack of readily available resources and no internet access at the school."

The findings further demonstrated that limited instructional resources constrained teachers' capacity to prepare engaging lessons and deliver meaningful classroom instruction. Similar concerns have been identified across different educational settings, where inadequate access to teaching materials and digital resources hindered teachers assigned outside their specialization (Hobbs & Porsch, 2022). Philippine evidence likewise highlighted resource limitations as a persistent challenge affecting instructional preparation among out-of-field teachers (Javier et al., 2026). Improving access to quality instructional resources, technology, and institutional support may therefore strengthen teachers' instructional effectiveness and professional confidence.

Coping Strategies Employed by Mathematics Teachers

Despite these challenges, the participants demonstrated resilience by adopting several coping strategies that enabled them to perform their instructional responsibilities effectively. Three major themes emerged from the analysis.

Table 2 summarizes the strategies employed by participants to address the challenges associated with out-of-field teaching. These findings demonstrated the participants' commitment to continuous professional learning and instructional improvement despite teaching outside their specialization.

Table 2
Themes on the Coping Strategies Employed by Mathematics Teachers as Out-of-Field Teachers

Theme	Representative Participant Statement
Sought Professional Instructional Support from Colleagues	"I sought guidance from colleagues who are experts in the subject matter..." – Teacher Ellipses
Fostered Stronger Teacher–Student Collaboration	"I encouraged students to express their opinions and insights..." – Teacher Diameter
Effective Use of Available Educational Resources	"I utilized resources from DepEd TV and YouTube..." – Teacher Ellipses

Theme 1. Sought Professional Instructional Support from Colleagues

Participants frequently sought assistance from experienced colleagues who possessed expertise in the assigned subject areas. Through collaborative discussions, they clarified unfamiliar concepts, improved lesson preparation, and enhanced their instructional confidence.

Teacher Ellipses shared: "In addition, I sought guidance from colleagues who are experts in the subject matter. Their valuable insights helped clarify complex concepts."

The narratives demonstrated that collegial collaboration functioned as an essential source of professional learning for participants. Seeking guidance from experienced colleagues enabled teachers to clarify unfamiliar concepts, improve lesson preparation, and strengthen instructional confidence. Previous studies have similarly reported that collaborative professional relationships support teachers' adaptation to out-of-field teaching by facilitating knowledge sharing and continuous professional learning (Hobbs & Quinn, 2021). Recent international evidence also emphasized collaborative learning as an effective institutional strategy for supporting teachers assigned outside their disciplinary expertise (Badaru & Ndlovu, 2025).

Theme 2. Fostered Stronger Teacher–Student Collaboration

Participants also encouraged active student participation by creating collaborative learning environments in which teachers and students explored unfamiliar topics together. Rather than positioning themselves solely as content experts, participants promoted open discussions and encouraged students to contribute their ideas during classroom activities.

Teacher Diameter explained: "I encouraged students to express their opinions and insights, creating an interactive learning environment where we could explore the subject together."

The participants' narratives indicated that collaborative classroom interactions encouraged active learner participation while reducing the instructional pressure associated with teaching unfamiliar subjects. By creating opportunities for shared learning, teachers were able to facilitate meaningful classroom engagement despite limitations in disciplinary expertise. This strategy reflects participants' adaptive responses to the demands of out-of-field teaching and demonstrates their commitment to maintaining effective learning environments.

Theme 3. Effective Use of Available Educational Resources

Participants also maximized available educational resources to strengthen their content knowledge and instructional delivery. They frequently used online educational platforms, instructional videos, and government learning resources to supplement lesson preparation.

Teacher Ellipses explained: "I utilized resources from DepEd TV and YouTube to gain different perspectives on the topic."

Participants demonstrated resourcefulness by maximizing available educational technologies and online instructional resources to strengthen lesson preparation and classroom delivery. Accessing digital learning platforms enabled teachers to supplement limited disciplinary knowledge while increasing instructional confidence. This finding aligns with global recommendations emphasizing the importance of technology-supported professional learning and equitable access to educational resources in strengthening teacher effectiveness (UNESCO, 2024). Such initiatives become increasingly important for teachers assigned to subjects outside their academic specialization.

Overall, the findings revealed that mathematics teachers assigned outside their field of specialization experienced substantial instructional, psychological, and resource-related challenges. Nevertheless, they demonstrated resilience by engaging in collaborative professional learning, fostering positive teacher–student relationships, and maximizing available instructional resources. These adaptive strategies contributed to their professional growth and highlighted the importance of sustained institutional support, continuous professional development, and mentoring programs in strengthening the competence and confidence of out-of-field teachers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study contributes contextual evidence on how mathematics teachers in Philippine public secondary schools navigated out-of-field teaching assignments through adaptive instructional and professional learning strategies. The findings demonstrated that although participants encountered challenges related to limited content knowledge, reduced instructional confidence, and inadequate instructional resources, they remained resilient by seeking collegial support, fostering collaborative learning environments, and maximizing available educational resources. These adaptive responses highlight the importance of sustained institutional support, mentoring, and continuous professional development in strengthening teachers' competence, confidence, and instructional effectiveness.

Based on these findings, the Department of Education and school administrators should strengthen teacher deployment policies and provide targeted professional development, mentoring, and coaching programs for teachers assigned outside their areas of specialization. Schools should also improve access to instructional resources, digital learning technologies, and collaborative professional learning communities to support effective teaching and continuous professional growth. Teachers are encouraged to engage in lifelong learning, professional collaboration, and self-directed development to enhance their instructional competence. Future researchers may replicate this study using larger samples, different academic disciplines,

or mixed-methods and longitudinal research designs to generate broader evidence on the long-term effects of out-of-field teaching on teacher development and student learning outcomes.

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