

Out-of-Field Teachers' Professional Resilience: A Grounded Study

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Abstract. This qualitative inquiry aimed to determine the coping strategies and bridge the lack of comprehensive understanding of the processes and factors contributing to out-of-field teachers' professional resilience. The in-depth interviews of the 12 participants generated emergent themes and central categories that revealed the OFT's coping strategies. The theory developed from the extensive data collected and examined showed the profound perception of how out-of-field teachers succeed in the teaching profession. A targeted professional development program for out-of-field teachers focusing on content and pedagogical strategies can be designed using the theory generated as a foundation. Through this research, other researchers may explore the development and implementation of targeted professional development programs and support systems that specifically address the unique challenges faced by out-of-field teachers and investigate the long-term impact of resilience-building strategies on teachers' teaching effectiveness and career satisfaction. By providing teachers with the necessary tools to effectively teach the subject, these specially tailored programs aid in closing the knowledge gap and help OFTs thrive in this noble profession.

Keywords: Coping strategies; Grounded theory; Out-of-field teachers; OFT resilience framework; Professional development program.

1.0 Introduction

Teachers are frequently regarded as modern-day heroes for their unwavering commitment to nurturing a positive learning environment by imparting knowledge and influencing the character of students (Garrucha, 2022). The statement emphasizes instructors' crucial role in influencing students' cognitive and affective growth, emphasizing the extensive influence of their commitment. The portrayal of teachers as contemporary heroes underscores the significance of their resilience and adaptation in effectively addressing the ever-changing demands of the educational landscape and society. In addition, empowered teachers exude energy, optimism, and hope, which helps create a supportive classroom atmosphere (Derakhshan, 2022). Their steady behaviors and attitudes harmonize with their everyday experiences, enabling them to remain consistent in their teaching practices (Mail, 2020). The focus on their positive influence within the classroom suggests that teachers' attitudes and behaviors can profoundly affect the learning environment, fostering a space where students thrive. Moreover, teachers showcase adaptability by evolving with educational advancements and societal shifts (Ficher & Baladeli, 2017). Teachers push educational boundaries, take calculated risks without missing opportunities, encourage during challenging times, tackle obstacles with humor, and love without limits (Daher & Hashash, 2022).

According to Monteiro (2015), teaching requires a certain level of professionalism, as it is best exemplified by embodying a blend of qualities, values, and knowledge. This idea is also affirmed by Beausaert (2013), who opined that as the leading figures in education, teachers need to be qualified and informed to transfer knowledge to their

students. Effective teaching is a personal as well as a professional endeavor. Nevertheless, to guarantee that students obtain quality education, an effective teacher must have a deep comprehension of the subject, a high degree of experience, and a willingness to impart knowledge.

In today's complex world, various challenges have confronted teachers and hampered them in fulfilling their professional obligations. Furthermore, teachers' creative ability and fortitude have always been at stake, especially with the new breed of academically challenged learners in a technologically advanced classroom environment. Therefore, learning facilitators need to upkeep themselves not only of content and pedagogical knowledge but also of technological skills to become effective reservoirs of knowledge.

UNESCO's Global Report on Teachers: Addressing Teacher Shortages (2023), teaching out-of-field, where educators teach subjects outside their formal training or expertise, is prevalent globally. This situation often arises due to teacher shortages and uneven distribution of qualified teachers, particularly in lower secondary education. In some countries, over 10% of science and mathematics teachers at the lower secondary level have no formal education or training in their subjects. The prevalence of out-of-field teaching is partly due to systemic issues such as insufficient teacher training programs and the casualization of the teaching profession, where many educators work part-time or on short-term contracts. It undermines the quality of education and impacts student outcomes negatively.

Similarly, Russell (2022) cited SEAMEO's research, which revealed that out-of-field teaching may harm the quality of education since teachers may need more pedagogical expertise or subject matter expertise to teach things outside of their expertise. Additionally, SEAMEO highlights the importance of strategic policies to ensure a more even distribution of qualified teachers, especially in rural and underserved areas. They also advocate for better data collection and research to understand the long-term impacts of out-of-field teaching on educators and students and to develop effective interventions to support these teachers' professional growth and improve student outcomes (UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023).

In the Philippines, out-of-field teaching presents several significant challenges, as highlighted by various reports and studies. The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) (2019) has underscored the impact of misassigned teachers on educational quality, noting that it can lead to reduced student performance and teacher burnout. To mitigate these issues, PIDS recommends policy changes to address human resource distribution in public schools. Also, the Department of Education (2024) has proactively addressed the situation by gathering insights from schools and emphasizing the need for specialized training and support for teachers teaching subjects outside their expertise. Furthermore, the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) offers professional development programs to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to handle out-of-field teaching assignments effectively.

While it is commendable that the government, through its agencies, has plans to help and assist out-of-field teachers, the researcher saw the need to unravel their coping strategies to fully grasp their experience and how they thrive in imparting learning amidst the difficulties they have experienced. Furthermore, there needs to be more non-publication of out-of-field teachers' accounts that unravel their coping strategies. Thus, this study aimed to determine the coping strategies of out-of-field teachers. Specifically, the researcher would like to generate a theory on teachers' coping strategies as they thrive in teaching subjects not aligned with their major.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study was anchored on Charmaz's Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), which offered a flexible and iterative approach to qualitative research, emphasizing the active role of the researcher in constructing meaning from data while remaining grounded in empirical evidence. Constructivist grounded theory, part of the pragmatic school, emphasizes the relationship between action and meaning in creating reality. The researcher developed the idea by interpreting the participant accounts describing actual events. Tan (2010) opined that in CGT, researchers are part of the world they study and the data they collect. They construct GT through "past and present involvements and interactions with people, practices and research practices."

Meanwhile, CGT begins with induction-derived evidence. It uses recurring techniques that switch between data and analysis. In addition to maintaining engagement and involvement with the data and developing analysis, CGT defends the comparative technique. Nevertheless, it uses fundamental grounded theory techniques for developing theories using comparative methodologies, like coding, memo writing, and sampling. This method uses a literature review constructively and sensitively to the data without imposing it on it (Charmaz, 2006).

2.2 Participants of the Study

The study participants were 12 public school teachers who had been teaching for over five years. The participants had been out-of-field teachers for at least two years and taught at least one subject that was not aligned with their field of expertise. These public school teachers were only among those who signed the consent and agreement as inscribed in this study's ethical procedures.

2.3 Research Instrument

As the primary tool for the study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the informants to help secure rich data from the field. Burkus (as quoted in Alboruto, 2015) asserted that the researcher was a tool for gathering data in a qualitative study. Given that the primary research instrument was the researcher, he should avoid any potential biases and peculiarities. These included circumstances resulting from the researcher's history, reasons for conducting research, and classifications or filters that could affect how one interprets actions and occurrences in the field (Yin, 2011).

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Charmaz (2006) asserts that data serves as the theoretical basis and that the developed concepts result from the data analysis. This is the constructivist grounded theory tenet that served as the foundation for the entire investigation. Since grounded theorists begin with data, gathering data is the first step in the modest qualitative investigation. The following data collection procedure was followed.

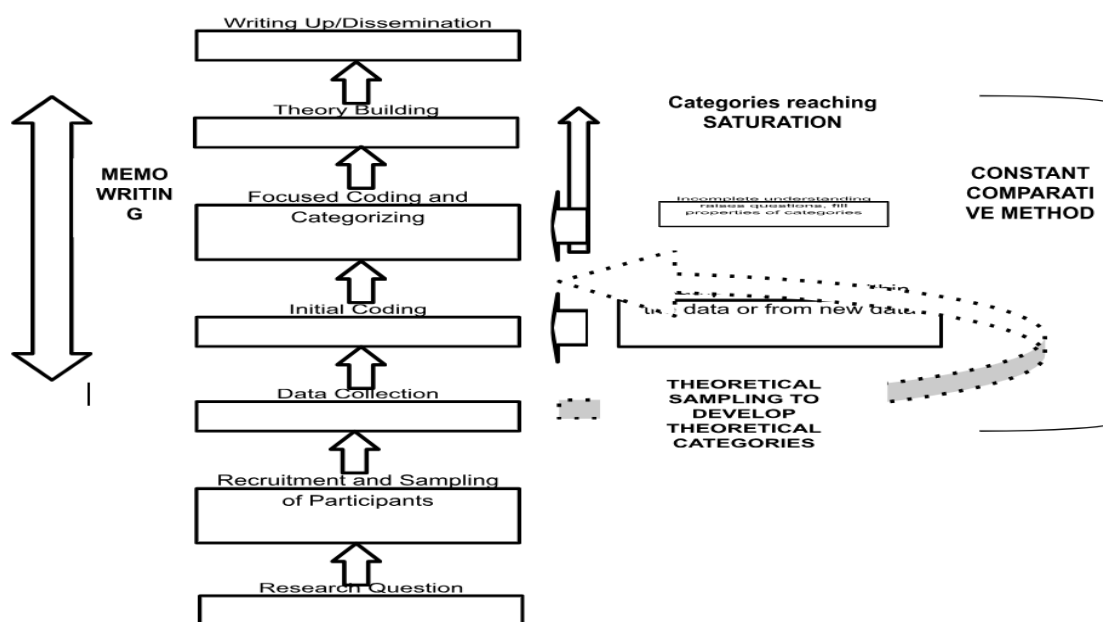


Figure 1. Visual representation of a grounded theory process (Charmaz, 2014)

Before embarking on an in-depth interview of the informants, the researcher identified public and private high school teachers who were teaching not in their major field of specialization, school heads, and division personnel. After identifying the initial samples of participants, a consent letter was sent to them. Upon the informants' approval, the researcher interviewed at their most convenient time and place. The interview protocol guided the researcher in eliciting the insights and ideas of the participants. The researcher observed the participants'

expressions, emotions, reactions, and non-verbal cues during the interview. Responses were recorded through the informant's consent, and field notes were also undertaken during the interview.

Grounded theory invoked iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Collecting, coding, and analyzing happened simultaneously and repeatedly. Data collection and analysis were interactive processes in which data were continuously collected and analyzed (Glaser & Strauss, as cited in Alboruto, 2015).

2.5 Data Analysis

According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theory coding generates the bones of the research analysis. It allows the researcher to think and ask analytical questions about the gathered data, broadening the researcher's understanding of the studied life and directing subsequent data-gathering. Thus, coding shapes an analytic frame from which the researcher will build the analysis. At least two main phases were involved in grounded theory coding: initial and focused coding. This study's *initial coding* activity included naming data fragments such as words, lines, segments, and incidents. The goal is to remain open to all possible theoretical directions while studying closely the data for their analytic import. In *focused coding*, the researcher selected the most useful or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data. Focused coding requires deciding which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize the data incisively and completely. When similar attributes of initial codes were combined, selective codes or categories were identified. The categories were combined into themes or theoretical codes from which a theory was abstracted.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, there was one critical personal trait that the researcher advocated. A strong sense of ethics was brought towards the conduct of the research, particularly regarding the specific procedures for protecting human subjects, being the participants of the conducted study, and handling the data. At the same time, the researcher observed discretionary decisions that would address concerns regarding the completion of the research project report and how the results were communicated (Yin, 2011). Below are the following ethical issues that were dealt with in this study, together with the explicit measures that were undertaken (Alboruto, 2015):

Voluntary Participation. After the research study participants are identified, the researcher personally explains to them the nature of the invitation so they would clearly understand the whole research activity. It was voluntary, and they would not be obliged or compelled to undertake the in-depth interview if it was against their free will. Neither would they be forced, deceived, or threatened if they opted not to participate in the research process. These were stated in the informed consent or any written communications. Thus, only interviews were conducted if the participants had signed informed consent forms.

Informed Consent. Before the interview, the researcher prepared an invitation or a written approval sheet containing statements indicating the study's background, purpose, and nature. The approval sheet was handed over to the participants and explained to them. They signed the consent form when they willingly agreed to participate in the research activity. The information sheet will contain the following: name of the researcher; the institutions where the researcher is connected; the purpose of the research; duration of the interview; tasks of the interviewee; written disclosure of the informant's safety, protection, confidentiality, and anonymity; manner of utilizing the gathered data; and the process of informing the result to the participants.

Confidentiality. Throughout the research activity, the researcher will uphold high discretion in keeping the informants' identity and the information shared possible. Confidentiality will be handled by not indicating the informants' names in any part of the written paper. Codes or pseudonyms were used to identify the participants during the recorded interviews. The same codes or pseudonyms were utilized when transcribing the participants' statements during the interview. Only the researcher had access to the raw data, which was kept in a secure place, and no one was asked to do the transcribing except the researcher himself.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Themes

After going through an intensive and iterative process of analyzing the data, the core theme that emerged was "Out-of-field teachers' professional resilience." From this core code, five significant themes have emerged such as:

Theme 1: Professional Competence Development

Theme 2: Social Capital and Networking

Theme 3: Resource Management and Technological Integration

Theme 4: Pedagogical Adaptability and Innovation

Theme 5: Well-being and Efficiency

Theme 1: Professional Competence Development

Developing the professional competence of out-of-field teachers is crucial for ensuring effective instruction across diverse subject areas. These educators often need more formal training or experience in their teaching subjects. Fliarkovska et al. (2022) supported this idea by saying that by investing in professional development, schools can help out-of-field teachers acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and strategies to deliver high-quality instruction. This not only enhances teaching effectiveness but also promotes student learning and achievement. Moreover, supporting the growth of out-of-field teachers fosters a collaborative and supportive school culture, where educators feel empowered to continuously improve their practice and adapt to new teaching assignments. Ultimately, prioritizing the professional competence of out-of-field teachers is essential for maintaining educational standards and promoting equitable learning opportunities for all students (Mesias, 2022). These are a few of the lines from the interview to substantiate the importance of developing OFT's professional competence:

"I get excited every time I will be sent to a seminar or training because I will learn something new." -P2

"When our school principal invited resource persons during our lack session, I made it a point to listen because it is one of ways of increasing my knowledge in the subjects that I am teaching" – P8

"I would join the training and workshop even if it means sacrificing my weekends to improve my skill." P-4

Theme 2: Social Capital and Networking

Social capital and networking are invaluable resources for out-of-field teachers, facilitating knowledge exchange, collaboration, and professional growth. Research by Penuel and Gallagher (2017) highlights the importance of social networks in providing support and resources for teachers navigating new subject areas. By connecting with colleagues, out-of-field teachers can access expertise and guidance that enhance their teaching effectiveness (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Furthermore, according to Bryk and Schneider (2002), social capital within schools positively correlates with teacher retention and job satisfaction, crucial factors for out-of-field teachers adjusting to unfamiliar teaching assignments. Building and maintaining strong social networks also fosters a sense of belonging and collegiality, which can mitigate feelings of isolation often experienced by out-of-field teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Therefore, fostering social capital and networking opportunities is essential for supporting out-of-field teachers' professional development and well-being in educational settings. Teachers emphasize this as stated in these lines:

"...with the help of my co-teachers, eventually it became easier." – P3

"When I struggle with any part of my lesson, I would usually run up to my senior teacher and ask for help from them. They are so generous that sometimes they had to extend their time in school to assist me." – P9.

Theme 3: Resource Management and Technological Integration

According to Jiang (2021), effective resource management and technological integration are essential for OFTs to improve their methods. Teachers can access various digital educational materials, such as multimedia platforms, courseware servers, and online libraries, by efficiently managing teaching resources using platforms that blend traditional methods with network technology. This integration allows students to have more individualized learning experiences, increase engagement, and have better access to resources, all of which help teachers provide

high-quality instruction. Virtual and augmented reality technologies can also be used to create immersive learning environments, which is advantageous for teachers and students (Junger et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the OECD (2015) emphasizes the potential of technology to improve educational equity and access, particularly for underserved populations. Integrating technology effectively requires thoughtful planning and ongoing professional development for educators (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), ensuring that technology enhances, rather than replaces, effective teaching practices. Therefore, by prioritizing resource management and technological integration, schools can create environments conducive to innovative teaching and meaningful learning experiences for all students. Some of the teachers' narratives are indicated below.

"I used YouTube and video clips, downloadable OERs, and other internet-sourced materials to understand further the concept I will teach. Students enjoyed this much, and it made me feel relieved." P5

"I do not want to be burdened by the thought that I do not have resources; I just used downloadable videos in class. The video presentation will help me demonstrate skills in PE." -P12.

Theme 4: Pedagogical Adaptability and Innovation

Pedagogical adaptability and innovation are essential for out-of-field teachers to effectively navigate new subject areas and meet the diverse needs of their students. Research by Shulman (1987) highlights the importance of pedagogical content knowledge, which includes the ability to adapt teaching strategies to different subject domains. Additionally, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) emphasize the role of innovation in enhancing teaching effectiveness and promoting student engagement. Furthermore, according to Kong (2019), pedagogical innovation is crucial for out-of-field teachers to bridge knowledge gaps and effectively teach subjects outside their expertise. By embracing adaptability and innovation, out-of-field teachers can foster dynamic, student-centered learning environments that promote academic success and engagement (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017). Therefore, investing in developing pedagogical adaptability and innovation is essential for supporting the professional growth and effectiveness of out-of-field teachers in educational settings. Some statements from the participants are evident below:

"I prioritize reading in advance every weekend to discuss the lessons with my students properly." P1

"It was difficult because I had no one to ask from but myself. I had to burn my midnight candles just to research..." P4

Theme 5: Well-being and Efficiency

Out-of-field instructors' productivity and well-being are necessary to impact their overall effectiveness and professional success significantly (Abubakar et al. (2020). High levels of well-being, including job satisfaction and good emotions, have increased instructors' engagement, creativity, and intrinsic motivation, improving team performance and productivity (Claudia, 2023). Moreover, job burnout mediates the relationship between occupation efficiency and well-being, emphasizing the significance of resolving burnout to improve teachers' general well-being and effectiveness. Maintaining instructional effectiveness, a positive classroom environment and employee job satisfaction depend on institutional support and policies that support teachers' well-being. These factors eventually improve teaching and learning outcomes. By prioritizing teacher well-being, schools can foster environments that promote job satisfaction, effectiveness, and student success (Collie & Martin, 2023). Therefore, investing in strategies to support the well-being and efficiency of out-of-field teachers is essential for sustaining a high-quality teaching workforce and promoting positive learning outcomes. These statements from the participants would validate this theme:

"When things are difficult, and I do not know what to do with my lessons, I usually take a break and go on recreational activities. I trek to the foot of Mt. Malindang, go biking, or refresh myself to the beach." P12

"I must stay long and finish reading or researching for my discussion the following day. I have enough time to study for the subject aligned to my major and those that need much time and attention." P11

3.2 Theory Generation

The theory of "Out-of-Field Teachers' Professional Resilience" emerged through examining interconnected themes that influence the experiences of educators teaching outside their expertise. Initially, the challenges faced by out-of-field teachers, such as limited subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, were identified as critical areas of concern. This led to exploring factors contributing to teachers' ability to overcome these challenges and thrive in their roles. Themes such as Professional Competence Development, Social Capital and Networking, Pedagogical Adaptability and Innovation, Resource Management and Technological Integration, and Well-being and Efficiency were critical components of out-of-field teachers' resilience. An analysis of the connections among these themes developed a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape out-of-field teachers' professional resilience. This theory emphasizes the importance of holistic support systems and development strategies to empower educators in diverse teaching roles and promote positive outcomes for teachers and students.



Figure 2. The theory of "Out-of-Field Teachers' Professional Resilience."

This integrative theory posits that the resilience and effectiveness of out-of-field teachers are underpinned by a multifaceted approach encompassing continuous professional competence development, leveraging social capital and networks, efficient resource and technology management, pedagogical adaptability, and maintaining personal well-being. These components interact dynamically, contributing to teachers' overall resilience and adaptability in out-of-field teaching assignments.

Based on this theory, schools should offer specialized professional development and establish mentoring systems to support continuous learning and guidance for out-of-field teachers. Facilitating collaborative networks and peer support groups can foster a sense of community and resource sharing. Ensuring access to diverse teaching resources and technology and training on their integration can enhance teaching practices. Programs focusing on stress management and effective time management are essential to maintaining teachers' well-being and preventing burnout. Encouraging reflective practices and flexible teaching approaches can help teachers continuously improve and adapt their methods to meet students' needs better.

4.0 Conclusion

The "Out-of-Field Teachers' Professional Resilience" theory offers a thorough conceptual framework for comprehending the distinct obstacles and capabilities encountered by educators who instruct in domains beyond their designated areas of expertise. It emphasizes the importance of cultivating professional competence, which empowers these educators to acquire the essential skills and information required to excel in their positions. The idea also underscores the significance of social capital and networking, positing that robust support networks are vital for educators to surmount the challenges of teaching in unfamiliar domains. The significance of pedagogical flexibility and innovation lies in their ability to assist educators in modifying their educational approaches to effectively address the different demands of their classrooms. Furthermore, the proficient administration of resources and the incorporation of technology play a pivotal role in augmenting the efficiency and efficacy of instruction. The generated theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of teacher well-being, advocating for using techniques that foster personal and professional development. This paradigm advocates for comprehensive support structures that empower teachers not in their field of expertise, promoting favorable outcomes for educators and their students.

5.0 Conflict of Interest Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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