

English Teachers Handling Other Subjects: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract. This phenomenological qualitative research study explored the lived experiences of English teachers in Urdaneta City who were assigned to teach non-English subjects. Using the census sampling method, all four English teachers handling out-of-field assignments participated in semi-structured interviews. The study aimed to examine the challenges encountered, instructional adjustments, strategies developed, and the effects of these assignments on their professional growth. Data were thematically analyzed, revealing significant challenges in content mastery, lesson preparation, and adapting to subject-specific terminologies, often resulting in stress and self-doubt. To address these challenges, teachers employed strategies such as simplifying complex topics, integrating digital tools, collaborating with peers specializing in the assigned subjects, and adopting student-centered techniques. While these strategies maintained classroom engagement and learning continuity, some participants reported overreliance on English-based approaches, which occasionally limited depth and specificity in teaching non-English content. Despite these limitations, the experience fostered professional growth among participants. Teachers reported enhanced resilience, empathy for learners, self-awareness, and a more substantial commitment to reflective practices, contributing to their lifelong learning and improved student relationships. The study concluded that while out-of-field teaching assignments posed difficulties in instructional alignment, they also catalyzed adaptability and personal growth. Recommendations include providing targeted professional development programs, peer mentoring opportunities, and policy reforms to align teacher qualifications with subject assignments. The study also advocates for institutional support systems, such as accessible resources and training programs, to equip teachers for mismatched roles while ensuring quality education. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing the professional challenges of English teachers handling other subjects to enhance their instructional effectiveness and sustain educational outcomes in diverse teaching contexts.

Keywords: English teachers; Instructional practices; Mismatch; Phenomenology; Professional growth.

1.0 Introduction

The assignment of teachers to subjects outside their specialization, known as out-of-field teaching, has become a significant challenge in the Philippine education system, particularly amidst the ongoing teacher shortage. This issue is especially prevalent among English teachers, who are frequently assigned to teach non-language subjects such as Mathematics and MAPEH (Music, Arts, PE, and Health). This practice raises concerns about the quality of instruction and its broader implications on educational outcomes. Research by the Second Congressional

Commission on Education (Chi, 2024) indicates that 62% of high school teachers in the Philippines teach subjects outside their specialization, with 65% lacking adequate training in these fields. This situation often results in lower student achievement, increased dropout rates, and diminished teacher morale.

Previous studies have highlighted how mismatched assignments lead to stress, reduced self-confidence, and decreased instructional effectiveness, particularly when teachers lack the necessary subject matter knowledge (Pillay et al., 2005; Sambe, 2020). Montero et al. (2022) noted that English teachers assigned to teach MAPEH struggled significantly with lesson planning and content delivery, adversely impacting their confidence and their students' learning experiences. Darling-Hammond (2010) further emphasized that mismatches undermine teachers' professional identity and increase turnover rates, disrupting student learning.

The theoretical foundations of this study draw on Shulman's (1987) Theory of Teacher Professional Competence, which underscores the importance of integrating Subject Matter Knowledge (SMK) and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) in effective teaching practices. Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) complements this by illustrating how teachers adapt to mismatched assignments through reflective practices, professional growth, and adaptive strategies. Roxas (2022) adds that such challenging experiences foster resilience and resourcefulness, qualities that contribute to professional development despite institutional barriers.

This research explores the experiences of English teachers at Badipa National High School, Urdaneta City, who were assigned to teach non-English subjects, focusing on the challenges they faced, the strategies they employed to adapt, and the effects on their professional growth. Specifically, it addresses the following questions: (1) How do English teachers experience and interpret the challenges of teaching non-English subjects? (2) How do mismatched assignments influence their teaching practices? (3) What strategies do English teachers develop to adapt to teaching non-specialized subjects? (4) How do these experiences impact their professional growth and reflective practices?

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform future policies on teacher assignments and professional development, aiming to address gaps in subject expertise and improve educational quality. By building on previous research, this study enriches the understanding of how out-of-field teaching assignments impact teacher performance, student learning outcomes, and overall educational effectiveness in the Philippine context.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of English teachers assigned to teach non-English subjects. Phenomenology was chosen because it focuses on understanding how participants perceive and make sense of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 2009). The research design aimed to uncover the challenges and strategies English teachers developed in response to mismatched teaching assignments. Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, allowing teachers to share their insights and reflections on the impacts of teaching subjects outside their specialization.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted at Badipa National High School, Urdaneta City, during the school year 2023-2024. It focused specifically on English teachers who were assigned to teach non-English subjects within the school. The locale was selected because teachers experiencing this mismatch were present, providing a relevant context for the research.

2.3 Research Participants

The participants were four (4) English major graduates from Badipa National High School, Urdaneta City, who were assigned to teach non-English subjects. They were selected using census sampling to ensure that all relevant participants, meeting the following inclusion criteria, were included: (1) English major graduates, (2) assigned to teach subjects other than English, and (3) with at least one year of experience teaching non-English subjects. This method ensured a comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

2.4 Research Instrument

The study utilized semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data from the participants. The interview questions were developed to explore the impact of mismatched teaching assignments on lesson planning, instructional strategies, classroom management, and professional development. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth responses, with follow-up questions used to clarify and expand on initial answers. Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes, and all were audio-recorded with the participant's consent for transcription and analysis.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection followed a systematic and ethical procedure. First, permission was obtained from the school principal to conduct the study. The participants were then contacted through formal invitations and provided information about the study's purpose and procedures. Interviews were conducted either in person or online, based on the availability and preferences of the teachers. Audio recordings were made with the participants' consent, and these recordings were transcribed for further analysis. To ensure confidentiality, anonymized identifiers were used during transcription, and all data were securely stored in line with ethical research practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research to protect participants' rights and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose and procedures and their right to withdraw without penalty. Anonymity was maintained by using coded identifiers for participants during transcription, and all data were securely stored to protect participants' privacy. The research adhered to ethical guidelines outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018) and other relevant authorities, ensuring that the study was conducted with integrity and respect for participants' well-being.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Experiences and Challenges in Teaching Non-English Subjects

The findings from SOP 1 revealed the multifaceted experiences and challenges faced by English teachers assigned to teach non-English subjects. Key themes include difficulty with subject mastery, emotional reactions to role changes, struggles with language shifts, and the impact on teacher identity. Teachers reported time-consuming lesson preparation and a lack of familiarity with subject content, as they were often required to relearn concepts outside their expertise. These findings align with Shulman's (1987) assertion that effective teaching relies on Subject Matter Knowledge (SMK) and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). A lack of familiarity with non-English subjects posed significant barriers, similar to the struggles highlighted by Montero et al. (2022) and Sambe (2020), where mismatched assignments led to self-doubt and reduced confidence.

Emotional reactions ranged from frustration and self-doubt to eventual acceptance and adaptation. Teachers described feeling unprepared at first but gradually found excitement and fulfillment in new roles, echoing the resilience noted by Hoekstra and Korthagen (2011). Language shifts further compounded these challenges, as the automatic use of English sometimes hindered effective instruction in Filipino or other subjects, expanding on findings from Montero et al. (2022), which primarily focused on English teachers' challenges with MAPEH. Despite these difficulties, teachers reported an expanded professional identity, embracing new subject roles like *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* (ESP) or Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which aligns with Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). These findings suggest that while mismatched assignments created stress, they also provided opportunities for personal growth, versatility, and a broader sense of purpose in teaching practices.

Table 1, shown on the next page, provides a detailed breakdown of the themes and subthemes discussed above. This table presents a comprehensive overview of the responses, highlighting the specific experiences and challenges English teachers face in teaching non-English subjects.

Table 1. Experiences and Challenges in Teaching Non-English Subjects

Themes	Subthemes	Responses
Difficulty with Subject Mastery	Time-Consuming Lesson Preparation	T1: "I had difficulties with content and strategies... it consumed most of my time reading lessons outside my expertise." T2: "Writing a Daily Lesson Log in Filipino is the most challenging aspect of teaching a non-English subject."
	Lack of Familiarity with Subject Content	T4: "The biggest challenge is relearning concepts for ICT... as English skills do not always apply."
Emotional Reactions to Role Changes	Initial Self-Doubt and Frustration	T1: "I was doubtful of my ability to teach non-English subjects at first."
	Gradual Acceptance and Adaptation	T2: "I felt excited because it is a new challenge." T3: "I embraced Filipino teaching... because I love the language, so I accepted the role."
Struggles with Language Shifts	Automatic Use of English Language	T3: "Shifting from English to Filipino was difficult... I sometimes used English by habit."
	Expanding Beyond an English Teacher Identity	T1: "Teaching non-English subjects expanded my view as a versatile teacher."
Impact on Teacher Identity	Embracing New Subject Roles	T2: "I now identify as an ESP teacher... this has deepened my sense of purpose." T3: "I love Filipino... So I learned to embrace the subject in just a year or two." T4: "I think it is my calling to teach ICT."

3.2 Impact of Mismatched Assignments on Instructional Delivery and Teaching Practices

The findings from SOP 2 revealed that mismatched assignments significantly impacted instructional delivery and teaching practices. Teachers demonstrated adaptability by using flexible teaching styles and integrating English communication techniques into non-English subjects like ICT. This mirrors findings from Hoekstra and Korthagen (2011), who observed that teachers relied on informal learning and creativity to bridge knowledge gaps. Despite unfamiliarity with subject content, teachers simplified concepts and occasionally introduced English concepts into lessons. This reflects similar strategies that Archer (1999) highlighted, where limited SMK forced teachers to depend on traditional or simplified approaches.

Table 2. Impact of Mismatched Assignments on Instructional Delivery and Teaching Practices

Themes	Subthemes	Responses
Adaptability in Teaching	Flexible Teaching Styles	T1: "I have become more flexible... incorporating collaborative activities that encourage sharing and teamwork."
	Integration of English Techniques in Non-English Subjects	T4: "I still integrate speeches like persuasive presentations and practical communication strategies, even in ICT classes."
Challenges in Content Delivery	Unfamiliarity with Subject Matter	T1: "When unfamiliar with the content, I simplify concepts and use interactive activities."
	Unintentional Integration of English Concepts	T3: "Sometimes I incorporate subject-verb agreement, even though it is not required for non-English subjects."
Confidence in Teaching	Preparation as a Source of Confidence	T1: "I read lessons beforehand, so I feel confident teaching topics outside my expertise."
	The Teacher as the Best Instructional Tool	T3: "The best instructional material is yourself... if you do not have confidence, no matter how good your materials are, nothing will happen."
Student Response and Engagement	Engagement with Familiar Content	T4: "Students respond positively to lessons that connect with their real-life experiences."
	Impact of Using Native Language in Teaching	T3: "Using Tagalog or Filipino makes students more comfortable... they express themselves better than in strictly English classes."
Lesson Planning and Strategy	Thorough Preparation for New Content	T1: "I make sure to fully understand the lesson before teaching it."
	Use of Consistent Strategies Across Subjects	T3: "Whether teaching in English or Tagalog, I use similar strategies—just translated to the appropriate language."

Confidence in teaching was often built through thorough preparation, with self-assurance emerging as a critical factor in maintaining instructional quality. This aligns with Sambe (2020), who found that preparation helped mitigate feelings of inadequacy. Interestingly, the findings highlight how student engagement was positively influenced when lessons were connected to real-life experiences and delivered in the native language, a nuance not extensively explored in prior studies like Montero et al. (2022). Consistent lesson planning strategies across subjects underscored the importance of preparation, reinforcing the resilience and creativity of teachers in maintaining quality education despite mismatches. Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the themes and

subthemes discussed above, shown on the next page. This table comprehensively overviews how mismatched assignments impacted instructional delivery and teaching practices.

3.3 Strategies for Adapting to Non-Specialized Teaching Assignments

Teachers employed various student-centered strategies to address the challenges of teaching outside their specialization. Real-life examples connected academic concepts with students' experiences, aligning with Hoekstra and Korthagen (2011), who emphasized contextualized learning as a key adaptation. Collaborative activities, such as group work and digital tools like Google Forms and Quizizz, fostered peer interaction, teamwork, and understanding, resonating with findings from Roxas (2022) about resilience and creativity.

The study also highlights the creative adaptation of English teaching techniques, such as daily drills for subject-specific terminology and multimedia resources like videos and documentaries, which simplify complex topics. This extends beyond the general strategies discussed by Montero et al. (2022) and provides a more detailed account of how digital tools can support diverse learning styles. Music and improvisational activities encouraged active participation and engagement, demonstrating how innovative teaching practices helped bridge pedagogical gaps. These strategies emphasize the role of adaptability and creativity in overcoming mismatched assignments and fostering effective learning environments despite the challenges.

Table 3 provides a detailed breakdown of the themes and subthemes discussed above, is shown on the next page. This table presents a comprehensive overview of the strategies employed by teachers to adapt to non-specialized teaching assignments.

Table 3. *Strategies for Adapting to Non-Specialized Teaching Assignments*

Themes	Subthemes	Responses
Use of Student-centered Techniques	Interactive, RealLife Examples	T1: "I use interactive activities and real-life examples to engage students."
	Collaborative Learning Activities	T2: "I always use a collaborative approach to encourage teamwork and social interaction." T4: "I had students use their phones in class for Google Forms and Quizizz to boost participation."
	Daily Drills for Terminology Mastery	T4: "I use daily drills to familiarize students with terms, especially in ICT."
Resource and Technology Utilization	Leveraging Technology for Lesson Delivery	T2: "I always prepare videos and documentaries that can help them understand the lesson better." T4: "I incorporate technology to simplify teaching ICT and to help students in other subjects."
	Incorporating Music and Creativity	T4: "I use music and improvisation to make ICT concepts relatable, especially when students need a motivational boost."

3.4 Influence on Professional Growth and Reflective Practices

Teaching non-English subjects profoundly impacted English teachers' professional growth and reflective practices. Participants reported improved adaptability, integrating creative techniques and flexible approaches to meet the diverse needs of students. This aligns with Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), which emphasizes the potential for personal transformation through challenging experiences. Hoekstra and Korthagen (2011) noted that teachers who adapt to unfamiliar teaching roles often undergo informal learning processes, fostering professional growth through resilience and self-directed learning. Teachers also developed greater empathy and stronger connections with students, becoming more sensitive to their needs and fostering a supportive classroom environment. These findings expand on Roxas (2022), which emphasized professional growth, by highlighting the deeper teacher-student connections that arose from these experiences. The increased resilience fostered by teaching outside one's specialization, as described by Sambe (2020), reinforced teachers' adaptability and resourcefulness, contributing to a sense of purpose and increased job satisfaction.

Reflective practice emerged as a central theme, with teachers consistently evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, committing to lifelong learning, and recognizing the importance of holistic development. This resonates with Shulman's (1987) emphasis on the combination of Subject Matter Knowledge (SMK) and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) in fostering reflective teaching practices. These findings underscore the

potential for reflective practices to transform teaching approaches, reinforcing the importance of teacher self-awareness. Moreover, participants expressed improved preparation and boosted motivation, resulting in greater job satisfaction and a more substantial commitment to student success, echoing Darling-Hammond (2010) on the relationship between teacher satisfaction and student outcomes. Additionally, as Pillay, Goddard, and Wills (2005) discussed, teachers often engage in self-study and professional development to overcome knowledge gaps when assigned subjects outside their expertise, further promoting professional growth and reflective practices.

Table 4 provides a detailed breakdown of the themes and subthemes discussed above, shown on the next page. This table presents a comprehensive overview of the responses, highlighting how teaching non-English subjects influenced the professional development and reflective practices of the English teachers involved in the study.

Table 4. *Influence on Professional Growth and Reflective Practices*

Themes	Subthemes	Responses
Growth in Teaching Adaptability	Improved Flexibility in Teaching Styles	T1: "Teaching non-English subjects made me more adaptable and improved my teaching skills."
	Enhanced Integration of Skills Across Subjects	T1: "By exploring different teaching methods for non-English subjects, I have learned to incorporate creative techniques."
Enhanced Empathy and Student Connection	Increased Sensitivity to Student Needs	T2: "I feel more empathetic to students... helping them express themselves in familiar language."
	Strengthened Student Connection	T2: "These assignments have strengthened my ability to connect with students personally, ... fostering a supportive classroom environment." T3: "I think the teacher and student connection becomes deeper ... I can see that I am helping them more as a teacher."
Continued Reflective Practice	Identifying Teaching Strengths and Weaknesses	T3: "The experience has helped me see the importance of empathy and patience when teaching non-English topics."
	Commitment to Lifelong Learning	T4: "I see the value of staying a learner myself... continuing to study ICT alongside English."
Refined Self-awareness as an Educator	Valuing the Importance of Holistic Learning	T2: "I am teaching the students not just to earn good grades but also to practice moral values that promote their overall development and well-being."
	Advanced Preparation and Readiness	T1: "I must always present myself, prepare, and be ready in the teaching-learning process."
	Boosted Motivation and Fulfilment in Teaching	T1: "These experiences have motivated me because they opened an opportunity to discover myself and succeed in various teaching roles." T2: "The opportunity to teach diverse subjects has invigorated my passion for education." T4: "When I see my students learn and at the same time apply what they have learned, I feel proud."

4.0 Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of English teachers handling non-English subjects. The results indicate that teaching mismatched assignments posed significant challenges, including stress, time-management issues, and content mastery gaps, which impacted instructional quality. However, the findings also highlight the resilience and adaptability of teachers, who employed creative strategies such as digital tools, contextualized learning, and collaboration to mitigate these challenges. Aligned with the literature, this study emphasizes the dual nature of mismatched assignments: they can undermine confidence and quality but also foster professional growth and reflective practices. Institutions are encouraged to provide training, mentorship, and access to digital tools to support teachers. Reflective practices and feedback systems should also be strengthened to enhance adaptability and resilience. Policymakers must prioritize aligning teacher qualifications with assignments to minimize mismatches, ensuring quality education while promoting the professional development of educators.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting English teachers' challenges and coping mechanisms in out-of-field assignments, offering valuable insights into how mismatches impact teacher efficacy and student outcomes. The results can potentially inform educational policies, teacher training programs, and support systems, ultimately improving teaching practices and professional development in the Philippine education system. Future research could explore the long-term effects of out-of-field teaching on teachers' career trajectories and student learning outcomes. Additionally, studies could examine the effectiveness of various

support strategies, such as peer mentoring or targeted professional development, in helping teachers navigate mismatched assignments. Expanding the research to include a broader range of subjects and educational settings would provide a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon across diverse contexts.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Michael B. Garcia: Managed all aspects of the research process, particularly the methodology, securing approvals and consents, and overseeing the entire research procedure—from topic conceptualization and data collection to analysis and ensuring ethical compliance. He executed the manuscript, made revisions, and finalized the submission, demonstrating a strong commitment to producing quality academic work.

Trisha L. Asuncion: Proposed the study, managed the introduction and background sections, and contributed to analyzing the results in SOP 3, including conducting the thematic analysis for SOP 3. She also assisted in data gathering and served as an interviewer.

Jenika S. Advincula: Created the conceptual framework and research paradigm. She contributed to analyzing the results in SOP 4, including the thematic analysis for SOP 4, and assisted with transcribing.

Lloyd M. Fernandez: Contributed to analyzing the results in SOP 3 and supported data gathering as a documenter.

Daniela Alexis M. Gueta: Contributed to the related research studies and helped analyze results in SOP 1, including thematic analysis for SOP 1. She also participated in data gathering as an interviewer and transcriber.

Deborah Ruth G. Javier: Contributed to analyzing the results in SOP 4, including thematic analysis for SOP 4, and supported data gathering as an interviewer.

Jayson C. Julaton: Contributed to the related research literature and analysis in SOP 2, and supported data gathering as an interviewer.

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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