

A Phenomenological Inquiry Into the Lived Experiences of Technical-Vocational Livelihood (TVL) Teachers Handling Non-Specialized Subjects: Basis For An Action Plan

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) teachers handling non-specialized subjects in Mainit I District, Surigao del Norte. The assignment of teachers to subjects outside their area of specialization presents widespread challenges, especially in developing contexts where teacher shortages are common. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected TVL teachers, the study uncovered key themes regarding their professional struggles, coping strategies, and personal growth. Findings revealed that most teachers felt unprepared and overwhelmed due to the lack of formal training, leading to decreased confidence and perceived teaching effectiveness. However, many demonstrated resilience by employing self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and adaptive teaching strategies. Significant experiences were often tied to

overcoming self-doubt, navigating unfamiliar content, and receiving positive student feedback. The mismatch between teacher specialization and subject assignments contributed to instructional gaps, time constraints, and professional frustration. Despite these challenges, some participants experienced professional growth and expanded teaching competencies. The study emphasizes the urgent need for targeted interventions, including regular subject-specific training, mentoring programs, improved deployment practices, and greater administrative support. The insights gained informed the development of a contextualized action plan aimed at strengthening instructional quality and teacher preparedness. These findings hold practical implications for educators, school leaders, policymakers, and future researchers in enhancing teacher support systems within the TLE/TVL curriculum.

Keywords: *Adaptability, Instructional support, non-specialized teaching, Teacher effectiveness, and Vocational education*

INTRODUCTION

Technical and vocational education plays a pivotal role in shaping the global workforce, equipping learners with skills aligned to industry demands. Countries such as Germany, Australia, and Singapore have successfully implemented robust technical-vocational education and training (TVET) systems, producing graduates with specialized competencies tailored to labor market needs (Anderson & Taner, 2022). Despite these successes, many education systems—particularly in developing regions of Southeast Asia and Africa—struggle with assigning teachers to subjects outside their specialization, often compromising instructional quality and student performance. Bayucan and Costales (2023) emphasize that effective vocational teaching requires both content mastery and pedagogical competence, reinforced by ongoing professional development and adaptive teaching strategies.

In the Philippines, the expansion of the K to 12 curricula has broadened the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track under the Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) strand, increasing the demand for versatile teacher competencies (Ramos, 2021). Although the Department of Education (DepEd) prioritizes teacher specialization for competency-based instruction, administrative constraints and staffing limitations often result in TLE/TVL teachers handling subjects beyond their expertise. According to Ganai (2023), teacher effectiveness depends on access to training, instructional resources, and institutional support—factors that remain inconsistently addressed despite policies promoting continuous professional development.

These challenges are particularly evident in the Schools Division of Surigao del Norte, where many TLE/TVL educators are tasked with non-specialized teaching due to workforce distribution issues. While some teachers adapt through self-directed learning and collaboration with peers, others face difficulties in lesson planning, instructional delivery, and curriculum alignment, which can lower confidence and reduce teaching effectiveness. The availability of support mechanisms such as in-service training and collaborative planning varies widely among schools, depending on resources and administrative priorities. Understanding these experiences is crucial for developing targeted professional development programs and institutional policies to strengthen teacher preparedness and instructional quality.

This study draws on Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to explore how teachers assigned to non-specialized subjects navigate these challenges. Bandura (Wu, Liu, & Huang, 2022) highlights the importance of observational learning, mentoring, and collaborative practices in building instructional competence, while Herzberg's framework (Ganai, 2023) distinguishes between motivators, such as recognition and professional growth, and hygiene factors, such as working conditions and administrative support. Together, these theories provide a lens for analyzing teacher experiences, coping strategies, and the motivational dynamics that influence their professional identity, satisfaction, and effectiveness.

Guided by Creswell's phenomenological approach, this study examines the lived experiences of ten TLE/TVL teachers in Mainit 1 District tasked with non-specialized teaching. It investigates challenges related to lesson planning, curriculum adaptation, student learning, and professional development, while also documenting coping mechanisms such as peer collaboration and resource improvisation. The findings aim to inform an evidence-based action plan to enhance teacher deployment policies, provide targeted professional development, and improve student outcomes. Ultimately, the study offers valuable insights for teachers, administrators, students, and future researchers seeking to strengthen the implementation and quality of technical-vocational education.

METHODOLOGY

The phenomenological qualitative approach employed to explore the lived experiences of TLE/TVL teachers in Mainit I District who are assigned to teach non-specialized subjects. The study focuses on capturing teachers' authentic experiences, contextual insights, and reflections on professional competence, forming the foundation for the analysis of challenges and adaptations in Chapter 4. By emphasizing meaning-making rather than predetermined variables, the methodology sought to understand how teachers interpreted and responded to their teaching assignments, and how these experiences shaped their instructional effectiveness and professional growth.

Data were primarily collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected TLE/TVL teachers from Mainit National High School, Magpayang National High School, and Paco National High School. Participants were chosen based on their assignment to non-specialized subjects for at least one academic year, ensuring a diverse representation of age, sex, teaching designation, area of specialization, and professional development exposure. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed throughout the process. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and validated through member-checking to enhance credibility.

The collected data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. This process involved familiarization with the transcripts, generation of initial codes, and clustering of related codes into themes. Themes were then reviewed, refined, and defined to accurately represent teachers' experiences. The iterative process of thematic reflection ensured that the emergent patterns reflected the depth and complexity of teachers' lived realities, including the challenges of content unfamiliarity, lesson planning, curriculum adaptation, and institutional support, as well as the coping strategies they employed, such as peer collaboration, self-directed learning, and improvisation of resources.

Following thematic analysis, the findings were compared with existing literature and theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 2. This comparison allowed the researcher to contextualize the experiences of TLE/TVL teachers within broader academic discourse, identifying areas of alignment, divergence, and potential contribution to the field. Instances of convergence, such as resilience and pedagogical adjustment, affirmed prior studies, while unique local challenges and coping mechanisms highlighted the importance of context-specific knowledge and practice. This engagement with literature strengthened the analytical rigor and theoretical relevance of the study.

Overall, the phenomenological design, combined with systematic thematic analysis and careful literature comparison, provided a comprehensive approach for understanding the lived experiences of TLE/TVL teachers handling non-specialized subjects. By prioritizing teachers' subjective perspectives while maintaining methodological rigor, the study generated rich insights to inform the development of a context-specific action plan. These findings have practical implications for professional development, institutional support, and policy-making aimed at enhancing teacher preparedness, instructional effectiveness, and student outcomes in the TLE/TVL curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The lived experiences of TLE/TVL teachers handling non-specialized subjects reveal a complex interplay of challenges, adaptation, and professional growth. Many teachers reported initial feelings of unpreparedness and overwhelm due to limited formal training in the subjects they were assigned, yet they demonstrated resilience and commitment to fulfilling their roles. Through trial-and-error, self-directed

learning, and peer collaboration, some teachers developed new skills and insights, highlighting their adaptability despite the mismatch between specialization and assigned subjects.

Significant experiences for these teachers often centered on overcoming self-doubt, receiving positive student feedback, and navigating unfamiliar content. Such moments required resourcefulness, prompted collaboration with colleagues, and fostered on-the-job learning. These experiences shaped both their teaching practices and professional identity, influencing classroom decision-making and enhancing their capacity to respond creatively and emotionally to instructional challenges.

The study identified persistent challenges faced by teachers, including limited content mastery, insufficient instructional materials, time constraints, and minimal administrative support. These issues contributed to stress, reduced confidence, and difficulty maintaining student engagement, emphasizing the negative impact of role misalignment on teaching effectiveness. Despite these systemic gaps, teachers employed coping strategies such as self-directed learning, online research, mentoring, and collaborative lesson planning, reflecting their proactive and resourceful approach to professional responsibilities.

The impact of teaching non-specialized subjects on professional competence was mixed. While some teachers experienced decreased confidence and perceived effectiveness, others reported broadened teaching skills and greater adaptability. These findings suggest that, with adequate support and professional development, role misalignment can become an opportunity for growth. The study underscores the need for targeted interventions, including regular subject-specific training, mentoring programs, access to instructional resources, and recognition of teachers' extra effort, as foundational components of a supportive action plan.

Recommendations from the study emphasize a multi-stakeholder approach to improving teacher preparedness and instructional quality. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on and share their experiences within professional learning communities to inform practice and identify learning needs. School administrators should provide tailored training, appropriate workload distribution, and institutionalized support systems such as mentoring and collaborative planning. Students can be engaged through feedback mechanisms to enhance classroom learning. Finally, future researchers are invited to explore comparative studies and long-term solutions for teacher deployment and curriculum alignment, contributing to policy and practice improvements in the TLE/TVL track.

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