



Challenges of Secondary Out-of-Field Teachers in the Philippines: A Meta-Synthesis Study

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This meta-synthesis examined the challenges encountered by secondary-level out-of-field teachers in the Philippines, where teachers are often assigned subjects beyond their specialization. Using a qualitative meta-synthesis approach and guided by the PRISMA protocol and Braun and Clarke's thematic framework, the study reviewed peer-reviewed articles published from 2019 to 2024. Eighteen studies met the inclusion criteria. Six interrelated themes emerged: (1) Interaction with Learners—difficulties addressing learner inquiries and conducting assessments; (2) Professional Development—limited access to relevant training; (3) Lesson Planning Demands—heavy preparation demands; (4) Resource Constraints—inadequate instructional materials; (6) Affective Domain—stress, self-doubt, and emotional strain; and (7) Instructional Knowledge and Skills—challenges in mastering unfamiliar content. These findings reveal how structural staffing realities shape instructional quality, classroom authority, and student learning outcomes. Methodologically, this study contributes an integrated thematic synthesis that consolidates fragmented local evidence into a coherent analytical framework. In line with SDG 4, the results underscore the need for strengthened teacher deployment policies, targeted professional development, and support mechanisms to improve instructional quality and promote learning.

Keywords: meta-synthesis, out-of-field teaching, Philippines, secondary education, teaching challenges

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching is widely considered as a noble profession, with educators shaping and inspiring the minds, hearts, and hands of learners, influencing their development (Fatima, 2023). In educational settings, a teacher serves as a professional facilitator of knowledge, competencies, and attitudes, guiding students in their subject matter and addressing other academic concerns (Hamsiah et al., 2022). Teachers are responsible for imparting practical knowledge and skills that enable students to survive in the contemporary world. Competent teachers can share content knowledge with students and inspire learners to reach their maximum potential through innovative teaching strategies and student-centered approaches (Hoidn & Reusser, 2020). Before being eligible to facilitate learning, the standard process of becoming a professional teacher is often complicated by the need for rigorous academic training over years to master the content and pedagogical strategies (Marco-Bujosa et al., 2020). The teacher training for pre-service teachers at the college level aims to equip student teachers with appropriate scaffolding of subject matter knowledge and suitable teaching strategies (Ayvaz-Tuncel & Çobanoğlu, 2018).

The noble profession of teaching is focused on nurturing future generations of citizens. However, this purpose is challenged by the increasing phenomenon of out-of-field teaching, where educators are assigned to teach subjects outside their area of expertise, which may compromise both their professional fulfillment and the quality of education relayed. Out-of-field teachers are defined as educators tasked to handle subjects or grade levels for which they do not hold the necessary qualifications or formal training (Javines, 2024). Worldwide, this event is a massive challenge within secondary education. This out-of-field teaching practice has become prevalent due to the ongoing shortages of qualified teachers specialized in the subjects required by academic institutions. Out-of-field teaching is prevalent across various types of schools, including public and private schools, as well as in urban and rural settings. But it often occurs in underdeveloped and geographically isolated educational institutions (Weldon, 2016). The issue extends globally, affecting developed, developing, and underdeveloped countries, with subject-specific shortages most acute in STEM disciplines and technical education (Simielli, 2023; Roxas, 2022).

The problem of teacher shortages in secondary education is multifaceted. Growing student populations resulting from demographic shifts have increased demand for teachers, which taxes the supply of qualified instructors (Bunch, 2024). High teacher rates of attrition, low salaries, demanding working qualifications, and lack of support, further intensify the shortage of teachers. The estimate level of teacher vacancies reached 90% caused by teachers who are leaving the profession (Learning Policy Institute, 2025). In addition, limitations in subject-specific teacher training and certification programs hinder the arrival of fully qualified teachers, especially in high-demand subjects and resource-limited communities. These causes lead to the reliance of schools on underqualified or out-of-field teachers to fill gaps (Economic Policy Institute, 2019; Du Plessis & McDonagh, 2021). These systemic issues decrease the quality of education and contribute to the continuous teacher shortages that many secondary schools face.

At the secondary level, there are cases of lack of teachers in topics that include science, mathematics, and special education, where the needs surpass the number of qualified teachers. According to EDCOM 2024, approximately 62% of high school educators in science and math, facilitate subjects outside their field of specialization, indicating a prevailing mismatch in subject alignment (EDCOM 2024). These subjects require subject mastery, and the shortage has been attributed to difficulties in recruitment, retention, and teacher preparation. Other minor secondary subjects, including language arts and technical education, have lower shortages. These variations among subjects indicate the impact of teacher shortages in secondary education and the increased reliance on out-of-field teachers, which can compromise the quality of instruction in academic areas (Learning Policy Institute, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

Out-of-field teaching at the secondary level has adverse effects on educators and learners. Teachers assigned to subjects outside their area of specialization experience lower confidence, increased stress, and decreased job satisfaction, which can lead to burnout and higher attrition rates (Beley, 2025). This lack of subject knowledge hinders their ability to perform quality instruction, prepare effective lesson plans, and implement appropriate teaching methods, which could impair the level of student learning outcomes (du Plessis, 2015). Specifically, learners taught by out-of-field teachers in STEM subjects, such as math, physics, and chemistry, are projected to perform worse academically and exhibit lower interest in pursuing related fields at higher education levels (Aburto et al., 2024). Moreover, schools with high levels of out-of-field teaching may have reputational damage and diminished community trust (Wheley et al., 2023). These consequences reveal the need for targeted policies and professional development to support out-of-field teachers.

Based on the UNESCO report, by the year 2030, the world is expected to encounter a shortage of approximately 44 million teachers in basic and secondary education (UNICEF, 2021). A swelling population, attrition, and a lack of teacher training are some causes of the problem regarding teacher shortages. From 2015 to 2022, the attrition rate in North America and Europe increased twofold as these regions faced challenges in recruiting prospective educators. School administrators in Australia, Africa, and Korea have difficulties finding qualified and expert teachers (OECD European Commission, 2024). Therefore, teacher training and recruitment processes must be continuously improved, and access to teacher education must be further promoted to face the high demand for teachers. As the high-income continents are affected by critical academic problems, developing regions are not exempt from this challenging situation.

Efforts are being made, led by the Department of Education (DepEd), to improve the quality of education due to the relevance of the literacy problem to the teacher hiring process, specifically in the lack of expert teacher graduates who can handle various subjects (Olvido et al., 2024). This study may serve as a reference for implementing professional development training related to the issue of out-of-field teaching. Also, there is a dearth of literature in synthesizing the findings of conducted qualitative studies about out-of-field teaching. Additionally, the challenges faced by out-of-field teachers, as explored in this study, may shed light on proposed solutions for necessary

interventions by national and local academic institutions. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no existing study has specifically examined the meta-synthesis of qualitative research on the challenges experienced by out-of-field teachers in the context of secondary-level subjects. This study aims to meta-synthesize the following research questions:

1. What are the out-of-field teachers' challenges?
2. What recommendations can be proposed to serve as a coping mechanism?

Review of Related Literature

Global Perspectives

International research reliably indicates that teacher shortages are the structural root of out-of-field teaching, as systems compensate for insufficient subject-specialist teachers by redistributing available teachers to subjects outside their expertise (OECD, 2024). Studies from Europe, North America, and Australia identify common causes of this phenomenon, which include the decreasing teacher supply, recruitment and retention challenges, uneven distribution of qualified teachers, and policy demands that focus more on staffing compliance than subject specialization. These systemic factors make out-of-field teaching not just an administrative issue, but also an impact of underlying labor-market and governance problems.

In Asia, the study of Hansen et al. (2025) highlights that out-of-field teaching persists even in well-resourced systems due to scheduling limitations, specialization gaps, and consistent shortages in STEM and foreign language topics. The developing countries have increased problems due to the limited training opportunities, resource inequities, and socio-economic inequalities increase teacher misalignment, especially in rural schools (UNICEF, 2021). As a result, many countries face a cycle in which shortages lead to an out-of-field teaching phenomenon, which in turn contributes to lower instructional quality and poorer learner outcomes.

Philippine Context

The Philippine situation reflects this global trend of out-of-field teaching. Teacher shortages, due to retirement, relocation, and inactive career tracks, have led to an increased reliance on out-of-field teachers, particularly in geographically isolated areas (Oliveros & Lachica, 2024; DepEd, 2024). Although the government has put forward plans to increase the budget and speed up hiring to fill vacant position (Kraft & Lyon, 2024), teacher staffing gaps exist. Out-of-field teaching, defined as assigning teachers to subjects or grade levels for which they lack formal qualifications (Smythe-Thompson, 2022), has become a common occurrence.

According to EDCOM II, during school year 2023–2024, nearly two-thirds of secondary public school teachers ended up teaching subjects that were not in their major. (Mokher & Mella-Alcazar, 2024), despite long-standing guidelines on matching teacher preparation with teaching assignments (DepEd, 1994). These data reveal a systemic concern, showing that staffing realities often outweigh official compliance policies.

Moreover, learners' outcomes also reveal the consequences of out-of-field teachers. The Philippines' below-average performance in PISA 2022 (Haw & King, 2023) is partly attributed to mismatches in instructional quality and teacher competency. Studies associate out-of-field teaching with limited content mastery, reduced pedagogical effectiveness, and adverse emotional effects on teachers (Porsche & Whannell, 2019; Pharis et al., 2019; Arendain & Limpot, 2022). These issues are intensified in specialized subjects such as Science, Math, and TLE, which are the areas most affected by shortages.

Despite policies aimed at reducing misalignment, various factors sustain out-of-field teaching. Teacher career choices are influenced by financial, familial, and contextual reasons (Kazi & Aklaq, 2017), as well as the willingness to fill vacancies (Andueza et al., 2018) and adaptability to new teaching demands (Buenacosa & Petalla, 2022), indicating that the phenomenon is both systemic and personal. In the K–12 curriculum, the wide-ranging nature of the subjects underscores the need for teachers capable of covering multiple fields, making it hard to match every teacher perfectly to their area of expertise (Cordova, 2019; Crompton et al., 2021; Roxas, 2022).

Critical Synthesis and Research Gap

The existing literature provides insights into the causes, consequences, and coping mechanisms associated with out-of-field teaching. However, most studies are about descriptive case studies, isolated qualitative reports, or context-specific surveys that examine single schools, single subjects, or single teacher groups. There is a dearth of literature about an integrative analysis that summarizes these individual findings to reveal multi-study patterns.

Moreover, although several Philippine studies have documented cases of misaligned teaching, no previous qualitative meta-synthesis has systematically integrated the body of evidence on secondary-level out-of-field teaching in the Philippines. This gap limits policymakers' and administrators' ability to derive unified, evidence-based strategies.

A meta-synthesis study is needed to address the gaps in existing qualitative research about out-of-field teaching. By synthesizing multiple findings, this study can reveal interrelated themes that individual papers may not have provided. This meta-synthesis approach also clears the conceptual linkages between teacher shortage, teacher deployment practices, and the persistence of out-of-field assignments. Moreover, this paper provides an enhanced basis for evidence-based policy changes in recruitment, professional development, and workload distribution. Therefore, this study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding essential for leveraging the quality of policies in the Philippine education system. By synthesizing multiple qualitative findings, this study contributes a novel understanding of the challenges faced by secondary-level out-of-field teachers.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative meta-synthesis method to systematically gather, analyze, and synthesize qualitative data on the challenges faced by out-of-field teachers at the secondary level. Meta-synthesis is a research method that involves collecting qualitative data to formulate new insights about a specific topic (Horton, 2020). Beyond summarizing, meta-synthesis is a systematic approach that incorporates interpretative features to create new interpretations from collated data from qualitative studies, which can be applied in various fields, including education.

Search Strategy

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guided the data collection in this meta-synthesis study (Curran & Williams, 2020). To conduct the meta-synthesis, a data source was utilized as a scholarly database, including Google Scholar, CrossRef, and Semantic Scholar, to access published journals on the challenges faced by out-of-field teachers. All published studies related to the topic from 2019 to 2024 were accessed and considered for the study. Due to the conduction of this study in 2025, the studies conducted between 2019 and 2024 were selected to focus on collecting the most recent data and highlighting updated research and current trends (Funa, 2021; Santos & Prudente, 2022). This study offers a clearer insight into recent trends in the rapidly changing educational field. Harzing's Publish or Perish (PoP) software was used in this meta-synthesis due to its helpful application in systematic reviews and accessibility to multiple databases. The keywords utilized are "out-of-field teacher," "non-major," and "secondary level" in the data retrieval until all pertinent studies were accessed.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

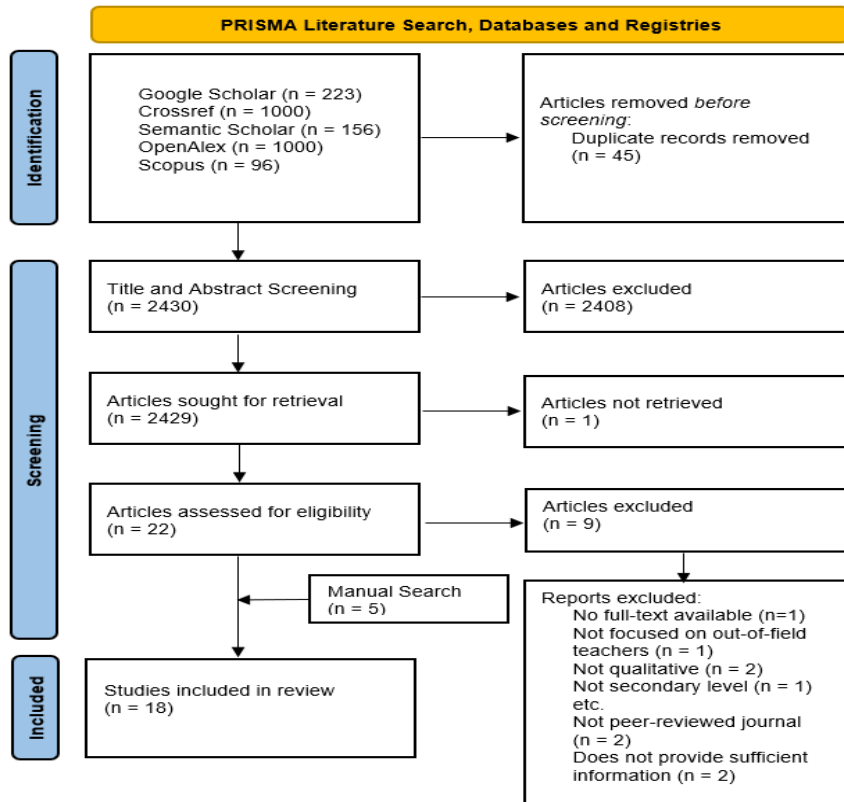


Figure 1
PRISMA Literature Search, Databases and Registries

To be eligible for inclusion, a study must meet the following criteria: a) published between 2019 and 2024; b) published in a peer-reviewed journal; c) conducted at the secondary level of education in the Philippines; d) about out-of-field teachers' challenges; and e) qualitative in form.

Study Procedure

The different databases were accessed using Publish or Perish Software, which included eighteen (18) papers, which were collected and saved to MS Excel software. The additional information for each study, including the number of citations, author, publication year, article URL, DOI, and abstract summary, was saved to MS Excel. Initially, 2,475 studies were gathered from the databases using the key terms: "out-of-field teacher," "non-major," and "secondary level." Then, using the dedupelist.com website, 45 studies were removed due to redundancy in the datasheet. After the

duplication removal, 2,430 papers were assessed to determine if their titles and abstracts fit the specific topic of this meta-synthesis, excluding 2,408 studies. From the papers initially screened, only 22 studies qualified for eligibility testing, and the set inclusion criteria served as the basis for assessing each study. Nine papers were excluded from the 22 included studies in the eligibility evaluation because they did not meet the appraisal's inclusion criteria. One paper was removed due to inaccessibility, another study was excluded due to its unfocused scope on out-of-field teachers, two studies are not qualitative, and one study is not at the secondary level. Two papers were not published in a peer-reviewed journal, and two research journals failed to provide enough information.

From the initial data, nine articles were excluded due to non-compliance with the inclusion criteria. To ensure that all the valuable information was included, manual searching was done to substantiate the findings. After manual searching, five studies that met the inclusion criteria were incorporated into the dataset to enrich the data. Overall, with the aid of PRISMA, the appraisal resulted in the analysis of eighteen (18) studies in this meta-synthesis about the challenges of out-of-field teachers.

Data Analysis

This meta-synthesis used thematic analysis to organize and analyze the collected qualitative data systematically. According to Braun & Clarke's (2019) six-phase framework, thematic analysis could be used to identify patterns from the data following the following phases: 1. data coding or familiarization, 2. initial code generation, 3. theme investigation, 4. theme review, 5. theme definition, and 5. report summarization.

FINDINGS

This section reveals the pertinent results from the collected, reviewed, and analyzed data from the included studies. Table 1 presents the pertinent details from each study, including the author and year, number of informants, subject taught, school level, and specific challenges faced in out-of-field teaching.

Table 1
Descriptions of the Included Studies

Code	Author(s), year	No. of Informants	Subject	School Level	Challenges	Type of Study
A1	Alcontin & Sinang (2022)	14	AP	JHS	content preparation, obligated to study key concepts, flexibility in teaching process	Phenomenological
A2	Andueza et al. (2019)	6	Out of field	Not specified	pedagogy, content	Gestalt Phenomenological
A3	Bayani & Guhao (2017)	7	Filipino	Not specified	lack of aptitude for the language, lack of administrative and logistics support, frustration and insecurity, inability to muster enthusiasm and establish rapport	Phenomenological
A4	Buenacosa and Petalla (2022)	6	English	Not specified	lack of knowledge of the content, lack of appropriate teaching, strategies, emotional unreadiness	Phenomenological
A5	Cabello et al. (2024)	5	TLE	JHS	lesson preparation and delivery, lack of resources, lack of expertise	Phenomenological
A6	David (2024)	10	AP	JHS	construction of lesson plans,	Phenomenological

					knowledge on the subject matter, assessment design	
A7	Evardo (2024)	14	Practical Research	SHS	lack of experience and aptitude, difficulty in establishing authority, difficulty in checking outputs, lack of administrative support	Transcendental Phenomenology
A8	Gargantilla et al. (2024)	10	Values	JHS	multifaceted challenge, bridging theory and practice, navigating material selection, innovative engagement strategies, integrating values across subjects, societal reflection, defining the role of teachers	Phenomenological
A9	Leonin (2024)	10	Out of field	JHS, SHS	lack of confidence, need learning resources, underload and staffing needs	Phenomenological
A10	Montero et al. (2022)	8	MAPEH	JHS	difficult and challenging, no formal trainings and seminars, resourcefulness and multimedia as a crash course	Phenomenological
A11	Raymundo (2021)	8	Out of field	SHS	preparation, lack of training, performance standards	Descriptive-Narrative
A12	Rebucas (2022)	14	Science	not specified	making lesson plans, familiarization of the subject, choosing teaching strategy	Phenomenological
A13	Roxas (2022)	26	Out of field	JHS, SHS	learning difficulties of the handled subject, lesson preparation, lack of pedagogical knowledge	Phenomenological
A14	Tingzon and Buyok (2022)	12	TLE	JHS	need to research from the internet, school-based inadequacies, need to learn more, no exact learning competencies, hard to understand or grasp some concepts	Phenomenological
A15	Villano-AC (2024)	10	Out of field	SHS	challenging, difficulty in adjusting to the academic content of the subject, difficulty in establishing authority, difficulty in employing appropriate teaching approaches, difficulty in addressing students' queries	Phenomenological
A16	Yumang (2021)	10	Out of field	SHS	struggle to respond to students' inquiries, burden of curriculum and lesson planning, scarcity of learning resources	Phenomenological
A17	Arendain & Limpot (2022)	9	Out of field	JHS, SHS	preparation for the topic before teaching, lack of mastery choosing the right teaching strategy, meaningful learning content	Phenomenological
A18	Baras & Gillo (2024)	Not specified	Out of field	SHS	content mastery, low self-esteem, cramming, demands of lesson preparation, reliance on preparation, resource sharing, activity-based teaching methods	Hermeneutic Phenomenological

As can be gleaned from Table 1, out of 18 studies, the year with the most frequent number of published papers is 2022, when seven journals were released, while there is only one published journal in each of the years 2017 and 2023. The range of teacher-informants varies from five, the lowest number of teachers, to 26, representing the highest number of informants, with a total of 179 participants for the summary of the selected studies. For the subjects taught that are included in the K-12 curriculum, the

studies covered Aralin Panlipunan, Filipino, English, Values, TLE, Math, Science, MAPEH, Practical Research, and other unspecified out-of-field subjects. Six of the studies focused mainly on teachers handling junior high school subjects, five highlighted the senior high school level informants, three journals gathered information from both junior high school and senior high school level teachers, and four studies did not explicitly state the level of teacher informants in the secondary level. Then, the specific challenges were tabulated to summarize each paper's findings, mainly concerning the lack of content and pedagogical knowledge, resources, and negative emotions associated with the out-of-field experience. Across the 18 reviewed papers on out-of-field teaching, the most utilized research design is phenomenology, with some documents representing specific branches of this approach. Only one paper has applied the descriptive-narrative methodology (Raymundo, 2021).

Table 2
Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes Emerged from the Included Studies

Meta-Theme	Themes	Codes	Frequency
Challenges faced by out-of-field teachers	Interaction with Learners	struggle of responding to students' inquiries, difficulty in addressing students' queries, performance standards	12
	Professional Development	no formal trainings and seminars are provided, lack of training, lack of administrative and logistics support	10
	Lesson Planning Demands	careful planning of the subject content, making lesson plans, burden of curriculum, assessment design	15
	Resource Constraints	resourcefulness and multimedia, research from the internet, lack of resources, navigating material selection, resource sharing	11
	Affective Domain	difficult and challenging, lack of confidence, emotional unreadiness, frustration and insecurity, inability to master enthusiasm and establish rapport, societal reflection, flexibility in teaching process, low self-esteem, cramming	14
	Instructional Knowledge and Skills	familiarization of the subject, need to learn more, hard to understand or grasp some concepts, lack of expertise, lack of knowledge of the content, bridging theory and practice, lack of pedagogical knowledge, lack of aptitude for the language, lack of mastery, difficulty in establishing authority, meaningful learning content, integrating values across subjects, the role of teachers, difficulty in employing appropriate teaching approaches, choosing the right teaching strategy, content mastery, activity-based teaching methods, difficulty in establishing authority, integrating values across subjects, defining the role of teachers	18

Based on Table 2, the identified meta-theme is the challenges faced by out-of-field teachers. Then, six sub-themes emerged from the meta-synthesis: challenges related to Interaction with Learners, Professional Development, Lesson Planning Demands, Resource Constraints, Affective Challenges, and Instructional Knowledge and Skills. The gathered codes were also presented and used to synthesize each sub-theme. The most frequent challenge recorded is related to instructional knowledge and skills ($f = 18$), indicating that teachers have difficulties with content mastery, pedagogical strategies, and establishing authority. Professional Development ($f = 10$) appeared least frequently among the themes, but it remains substantial. Moreover, the conceptual diagram presenting the interrelatedness of the crafted six themes are shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2
PRISMA Literature Search, Databases and Registries

Theme 1. Challenges related to Interaction with Learners (12 studies)

The emerging theme related to challenges in interaction with learners stemmed from the codes: monitoring learners' development, the struggle to respond to students' inquiries, and performance standards. As the primary beneficiaries of education, students are taught vital lessons and competencies in their classes. Here is an excerpt from the study that addresses the challenges faced by learners.

"One of the hardest parts for me is when almost 75% of my students failed on our first quiz. Is it negligence on my teaching paper's application or is the deliberation of the teacher of the lesson itself?" – A11

Out-of-field teachers often struggle to monitor learners' progress due to uncertainty about lesson content and a lack of knowledge of assessment requirements. Problems that out-of-field teachers face in monitoring learners' progress can be attributed to inadequate knowledge about the assessment, which is contextualized to the subjects they teach. Out-of-field teachers consistently encounter challenges in addressing learners' questions and monitoring student performance across studies. Additionally, a lack of appropriate modifications to assessment scales that fit the specific level of learners. These challenges stem from limited familiarity with subject content and difficulty interpreting learner needs during instruction.

Theme 2. Challenges related to Professional Development (10 studies)

In professional development, the lack of specific subject teacher training and relevant seminar opportunities posed a challenge for out-of-field teachers. Many educators teaching outside their specialization had not received the vital professional education preparation. This concern was shown in the narratives of several participants, who shared:

"It was off since we were not given any training or seminars that had something to do with non-MAPEH major teachers teaching the subject MAPEH. We, teachers, have to look for our own ways for us to be equipped with all the knowledge about the lessons to be discussed " – A10

Out-of-field teachers faced gaps in professional development due to the lack of targeted training or seminars specific to the subjects they teach. Teachers rely on self-directed learning and informal strategies to compensate for insufficient formal training. Educators are challenged to deliver content, implement pedagogical strategies, and engage students without adequate access to formal professional development opportunities. The effectiveness of out-of-field teachers is constrained by inadequate professional development, forcing them to adopt self-directed learning to bridge knowledge gaps.

Theme 3. Challenges related to Lesson Planning (15 studies)

In addition, lesson planning was a difficulty in terms of the detailed context of subject content and assessment. The following is an excerpt from a participant:

"As a TLE teacher handling non-TLE subjects, I experienced the following struggles and challenges: limited expertise on the subject leading to a challenging creation of effective lesson plans and quality instruction, and on balancing workloads." – A5

This statement ponders the difficulty of aligning lesson content with curriculum content when the teacher lacks formal training and knowledge in the subject area. Without in-depth subject knowledge, it is hard for out-of-field teachers to conceptualize which topics are essential, in what sequence, and in what context.

The challenge of aligning lessons with the curriculum, with a lack of content knowledge, made lesson planning a challenging task for out-of-field teachers. As a result, careful planning of learners' content becomes a challenging task, involving excessive time spent studying the material and utilizing online resources.

Theme 4. Challenges related to Resource Constraints (11 studies)

Another significant difficulty faced by out-of-field teachers is utilizing available resources to support instruction planning in their subject content. As depicted by an informant, the resource problem was a concern relevant to out-of-field teaching. Here is an excerpt from an informant:

"Yes, learning materials and other learning resources like worksheets for interactive activities or as a guide for both teachers and learners, as well as educational videos and biopics, which could help in the learning process." -A9

Most out-of-field teachers address their limited subject mastery by demonstrating resourcefulness in frequently relying on multimedia tools, online research, and downloadable materials to plan and execute lessons. Although these actions demonstrate adaptability, systemic gaps are still prevalent. Without sufficient access to adequate, subject-specific teaching resources, out-of-field teachers often rely on

internet-based content. This dependence may affect the accuracy and suitability of instructional materials used by out-of-field teachers.

Theme 5. Challenges related to Affective Domain (14 studies)

One of the important parts of the teaching profession is the affective domain. It is composed of emotions, attitudes, motivation, and confidence of a teacher. For out-of-field teachers, this aspect serves as a sensitive area, for they have suffered from emotional and psychological challenges. One teacher has expressed:

"[I feel] less confident in my specialized teachers, I am hardly familiar with the subject matter." – A9

Teaching out-of-field is complex and challenging due to the need to navigate unfamiliar content, which can trigger a lack of confidence and emotional unease in engaging with learners. Instructors might enter the classroom already feeling unprepared, which may lead to frustration and insecurity, particularly when learners ask questions they cannot answer. These experiences may negatively impact the level of self-efficacy among out-of-field teachers. Entering the classroom unprepared can lead to feelings of insecurity, difficulty responding to student questions, and a decrease in self-efficacy. Emotional and psychological challenges hinder teachers' ability to demonstrate enthusiasm and build positive relationships with students. The affective Domain of out-of-field teachers is critical to effective teaching; emotional challenges, such as low confidence and anxiety, reduce the capacity to engage learners meaningfully. Teachers' unfamiliarity with content not only affects knowledge delivery but also their motivation, attitudes, and relational effectiveness.

Theme 6. Challenges related to Instructional Knowledge and Skills (18 studies)

One of the challenges that out-of-field teachers face is the mismatch between their qualifications and the demands of their subjects. This instructional skills mismatch creates a barrier to effective content delivery and the integration of theory and practice. Many out-of-field teachers deal with unfamiliar subjects, which can hinder effective instruction. One respondent reflected:

"Being flexible in areas of teaching, the changes of strategies begin when you have a specific teaching strategy but would not fit the application of activities which could not be suitable for the student's knowledge." - A1.

"I bring with me lots of materials, but before I start with the lesson proper, I give motivation, then I prepare the activities and make sure that they are engaging to the students because the subject is already difficult and is not my field, and so sometimes I just cope and make up using the visual aids like PowerPoint presentations and videos." - A4

The lack of familiarity with the subject often requires out-of-field teachers to spend increased time outside to learn more about the subject, often without the benefit of proper guidance. Many teachers expressed that they find it challenging to understand concepts themselves, which hampers their ability to reason. The challenge of skills mismatch exacerbates the lack of mastery and insufficient knowledge, resulting in

shallow and misaligned lessons that fail to align with the current curriculum. The teacher's role as a learning facilitator is challenged when the teacher lacks confidence in the subject matter. In-field teachers often employ strategies to foster learners' engagement in real-life contexts, whereas out-of-field teachers may rely heavily on textbooks or traditional teaching styles. This negatively affects their ability to create efficacious learning experiences and adapt instruction based on learners' needs. Instructional skill gaps among out-of-field teachers create systemic challenges in teaching effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

This meta-synthesis study collected findings from the journal articles indexed in reputable databases between the year 2019 to 2024. The synthesized result from the studies included infers that out-of-field teaching causes several challenges to out-of-field teachers. These challenges were related to the crafted themes about engaging with students, teacher training, preparing lessons, accessing teaching resources, emotional challenges, and instructional knowledge and skills.

Some of the studies in this meta-synthesis presented different problems related to teacher and learner interactions with each other. As a teacher, assessing the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of learners is one of the important tasks of teachers. Out-of-field teachers have unpleasant experiences in responding to students' questions, for they know their limited knowledge about their handled topic (Eroja et al., 2025). Out-of-field teachers are expected to correct learners' misconceptions but due to a lack of subject matter expertise, they may fail to offer correct answers (Luft et al., 2020). As a result, students missed to receive correct answers, which hinders the development of their critical thinking skills and leads to a loss of trust in the authority of the assigned teacher (Porsch & Whannell, 2019).

Another difficulty encountered by out-of-field teachers is the concern about inadequate professional development. The lack of subject-specific training and seminars creates a professional gap. This leads to the dependence of out-of-field teachers on self-directed learning strategies to improve their subject matter knowledge. This result supports a study that gives importance to continuous professional development to maintain teaching effectiveness (Saleem & Dogar, 2021). To deliver content, apply pedagogical strategies, and motivate learners without sufficient recipient of formal training and seminars would be challenging for the out-of-field teachers. The lack of formal training on specific subjects is an essential concern due to its effects on teacher identity, instructional effectiveness, and overall classroom dynamics (Luft et al., 2020).

Moreover, the informant highlighted the challenge of creating effective lesson plans, which also require the application of pedagogical strategies related to the topic. The challenge of lesson planning is further increased by the burden of the curriculum, which demands full coverage of required competencies within limited instructional time. Out-of-field teachers must also design assessments to develop valid and reliable tools that measure learning outcomes. Out-of-field teacher experience exhibited how out-of-field teaching creates an environment where instructional planning becomes technically demanding and emotionally stressful (Du Plessis, 2020). The pressure to seek

curriculum goals, design assessments, and deliver quality instruction despite limited background knowledge results in lowered teaching confidence (Putwain & von der Embse, 2019).

Additionally, another extracted theme revolves around the challenges of the lack of available teaching resources. Depending on the supporting resources, this could negatively affect the accuracy of the instructional materials that out-of-field teachers utilize for their learners. Because out-of-field teachers may lack content knowledge, they often encounter difficulties in selecting the most suitable materials for their lessons. Without clear teaching guidelines or systematic support, their ability to select and apply resources effectively is limited. The challenge of resource management may be heightened, leaving teachers to search a wide array of online content without proper guidance (Singun, 2025).

Additionally, this study revealed that out-of-field teachers face challenges in the affective domain. These experiences may negatively impact the level of self-efficacy among out-of-field teachers. Additionally, this emotional issue may hinder the exhibition of enthusiasm necessary for effective teaching and establishing close relationships with students (Elsayed et al., 2025). When a teacher is overwhelmed, the generation of passion and connection that inspires student engagement becomes a struggle (Barkley & Major, 2020). In effect, when students sense that a teacher lacks confidence or depth in a subject, it may erode respect, making it harder for the teacher to show control or engage with learners (Curwin, 2018).

This meta-synthesis also highlighted that one of the challenges faced by out-of-field teachers is inadequate instructional skills. Depending on pre-made teaching materials to cope with limited subject content knowledge, out-of-field teachers tend to focus more on maintaining student engagement rather than prioritizing the accuracy of instruction delivery. While instructors strive to motivate learners, the lack of effective pedagogical strategies often results in inadequate content delivery. Additionally, integrating values across the taught topics became a challenge when the teacher had a limited grasp of the contextual relevance of the topic. As a result, out-of-field teachers often failed to employ appropriate teaching practices, and their over-dependence on generic strategies could limit the attainment of deeper conceptual understanding (Padermprach, 2017).

The six themes convey the causes of challenges resulting from a deficit in pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), which is the specialized teacher knowledge that combines a deep understanding of subject matter with effective pedagogical strategies for teaching (Fernandez, 2014). In the theme "Interaction with Learners," many out-of-field teachers struggle to clarify learners' misconceptions because they lack the content knowledge and pedagogical strategies needed for effective teaching and learning. This aligns with research showing that a strong level of PCK motivates instructors to prepare for student difficulties and create explanations (Park & Oliver, 2008). Additionally, the themes related to lesson planning and instructional skills highlight areas where PCK is lacking, as planning lessons and selecting teaching strategies require both content knowledge and pedagogical reasoning. Even when teachers adapt available resources, without

PCK, they may struggle to assess whether a given worksheet, video, or multimedia tool is aligned with lesson and curricular aims.

The relevant concept regarding teachers' level of self-efficacy, as related to Bandura's social cognitive theory, can be applied to the findings. Self-efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs in their capability to teach and impact student learnings. The theme about the affective domain, where teachers experience low confidence, high stress, and persistent insecurity, is relevant to self-efficacy. This emotional difficulty affects their interaction with learners that results from low efficacy and avoiding open-ended questioning. The out-of-field teachers' low self-efficacy also diminishes the instructional skills. Out-of-field teachers may depend on generic teaching strategies due to their doubt on their ability to manage more innovative practices. For example, a review in Nigerian country highlighted how self-efficacy, PCK, and out-of-field teaching are correlated and impact the teachers' self-efficacy level (Aina & Olanipekun, 2015).

Finally, many of the emotional and professional development challenges are related to identity of teacher. The teacher's identity is depicted as the point of view on how teachers assess themselves professionally, their subject, role, and task within the classroom. The theme about professional development relates that out-of-field teachers lack identity validation. Without the proper alignment, out-of-field teachers may experience the imposter syndrome that results in lower credibility and lower well-being. Studies about teacher identity (Quispe Flores et al., 2024) indicates that when institutional systems fail to aid the instructors' sense of growth, identity stress and disengagement might occur.

All six themes point out a systemic issue which is the misalignment between teacher preparation and teaching role assignments. In effect, out-of-field teachers are often assigned into subjects for which they have not been prepared in terms of pedagogical content knowledge. This study's findings implies that the root problem is not simply that teachers are teaching out-of-field. This infers that the status of educational system about the policies, training, and resource allocation are insufficient to resolve this phenomenon. Solving these challenges would need wide-scale reforms that include alignment assignment policies, sustained professional development, sufficient resource infrastructure, and institutional support.

CONCLUSION

This meta-synthesis on out-of-field teaching yielded interconnected challenges that mainly impact the quality of instruction and teachers' well-being. Six themes were culled from this study, including the challenges related to interaction with learners, professional development, lesson planning demands, resource constraints, affective challenges, and the integration of content knowledge and pedagogy. These findings regarding the challenges faced by out-of-field teachers need the implementation of educational interventions. The Department of Education (DepEd) and educational institutions should implement subject-specific programs and increase access to relevant resources. The availability of support systems and professional communities could also increase the level of self-efficacy and instructional skills of teachers. The limitations of this meta-synthesis are mainly due to its focus on qualitative research about secondary-

level education within the Philippines. Moreover, future research could explore mixed-methods or longitudinal studies to investigate the impact of professional development on the effectiveness of out-of-field teaching. Addressing these educational problems would be a step toward improving teacher preparedness and instructional quality, aligned with SDG 4.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that the out-of-field teachers be willing to adapt to open-mindedness to overcome the teaching challenges with fulfillment. In addition, educational institutions might introduce peer-to-peer collaboration among educators to share expertise and strategies in teaching their respective subjects. Administrators play an important role in allocating appropriate teaching loads to the instructors, as the situation makes it possible to create priority to align the assigned subject with the major of a teacher. Also, organized programs such as seminars, training, curriculum development, and workshops must be accessible to out-of-field teachers who need assistance in their assigned subject areas. Implementing Virtual Professional Learning Community (VPLC) would permit the educational collaboration to provide teaching resources and practical assistance to address the same teaching challenges within a community. The government provision of scholarships for educators to pursue higher education could widen the expertise of the out-of-field teachers. Moreover, educational agencies, including the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education, must plan and execute more appropriate hiring selections to reduce the number of out-of-field teachers and improve all students' education quality.

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