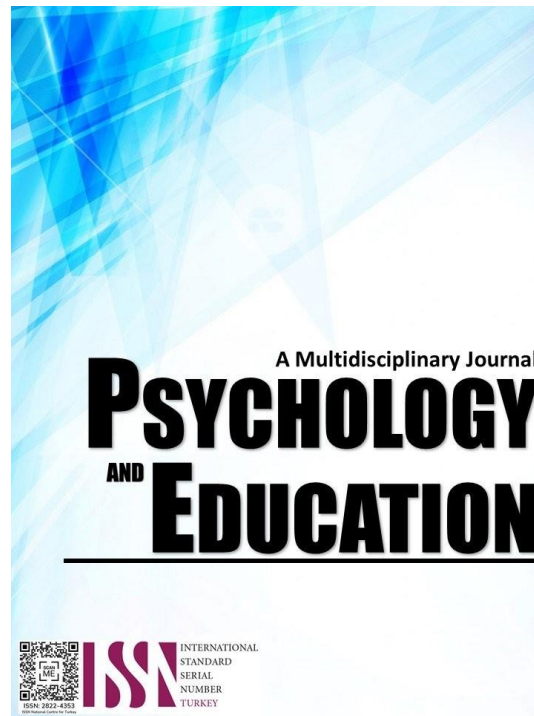


# **VERTICAL ARTICULATION OF SPECIALIZATION AMONG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS: A PHENOMENOLOGY**



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## Vertical Articulation of Specialization Among Junior High School Teachers: A Phenomenology

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### Abstract

Teaching is a difficult profession. In addition to being adept at interacting with students, teachers must be able to adapt to the ever-changing curriculum in their field. However, it is very evident that there are many teachers who are assigned to teach subjects outside their specialty. This phenomenological study aims to examine the endeavor and adjustment or adaptation of teachers teaching non-specialized subjects. This study is using phenomenology. The participants were chosen using a purposive-sampling technique. This study is based on the research-based CANNAS theory of Connectedness, Awareness, Needs Analysis, Negotiation, Action and Support. The researchers used a semi-structured questionnaire in collecting data from the ten (10) teachers of Bitoon National Vocational High School- Dumanjug, Cebu. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the data gathered. The result presented three (3) key themes namely: (1) the unforeseen hustle; (2) the contemporary aid; and (3) the proposal. To address these issues, teachers should focus solely on their major. On the other hand, administrators must be unbiased in giving teaching loads to teachers based on their qualifications. This analysis can serve as an enlightenment among higher officials in the department of education so that management plan can be crafted to effectively communicate the needs of the teachers teaching subjects not of their area of expertise.

**Keywords:** *teachers, management plan, unforeseen hustle, contemporary aid, proposal*

### Introduction

For the academic year 2022-2023, the Department of Education (DepEd) reported that more than 27.1 million students had enrolled, but despite the increasing number, the need for a specialized teacher has not yet been filled. With this, many teachers are asked to teach subjects other than their field of specialization, so vertical articulation of specialization is not practiced. A study by Caldis (2017) found that teachers, especially the beginners, are being asked to teach subjects that do not correspond to their areas of expertise. However, the problem of teachers lacking the educational preparation and background to teach outside their discipline remains unsolved (Hobbs, 2013; Abucejo et al., 2022). As a result, the subject's integrity is compromised, student disengagement is increased, students' learning is inefficient, and teachers are uncertain about their ability to teach effectively (Cabello, 2022).

Junior High School teachers are extremely important in our society, especially for the students. However, teachers who teach subjects outside their area of expertise make their students less efficient at learning. A teacher specializing in MAPEH who teaches Mathematics, for example, would find it difficult to deliver the lesson. With this, the struggle of the teacher is unbearable as a consequence of this circumstance. According to Kumar & Parveen (2013), in order to deliver high-quality education, teachers must provide

the most appropriate tools, such as content expertise, teaching techniques, and an understanding of the caliber of their work. As a result, teacher competency is critical to students' performance (Ando et al., 2022).

With the implementation of the K-12 program, more teachers from the Junior High School applied to the Senior High School for a greener pasture, leaving the Junior High School with a shortage of specialized teachers. One issue that has received attention is teaching outside of one's area of expertise (Weldon, 2016). Teaching subjects not inclined to the field of specialization is a global phenomenon that has the potential to impact on students' educational experiences, primarily in public schools (Fuente, 2019). It's a crucial concern because if teachers are given areas in which they lack expertise, they risk becoming drastically underqualified (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Unqualified teachers can negatively impact student performance and the teaching and learning processes (Zhou, 2013). This is a recurring scenario in the majority of Philippine schools that has yet to be resolved.

The unmatched number of teachers in terms of students and subjects taught, with some teachers being tasked with teaching subjects outside their specialty is the reason for this study. The unfair assignment of loads, the burden of teaching subject outside the field of specialization for the teachers are just some of the few reasons why this study is vital (Riconalla et al., 2022). This study desired to find out the emotions,

challenges, support, and coping strategies that teachers deal with.

Every teacher is required by Section 16 of the Education Act of 1982 to execute one's responsibilities in line with those guiding principles, purposes, and goals of the institution and to perform that within the limitations of the available school resources, each teacher is responsible for efficiently and effectively achieving specific learning objectives that support the country's development goals (Longcob et al., 2020). With this, teachers are the sources of learning for students, and they must be insistent in all tasks given to them to improve the learners' capabilities in various areas and aspects of life. This demonstrates that teachers have a significant influence on their students' academic achievements (Cabello et al., 2021; Carriaga et al., 2022). This has led researchers to consider the study on Vertical Articulation of Specialization for Junior High School teachers. This study delved into their lived experiences, challenges, and strategies for teaching subjects outside of their area of expertise. This research aids in the development of management, supervision, and guidance strategies and policies.

### Research Questions:

This study aspired to look into and evaluate the lived experiences of the junior high school teachers handling subjects that are not vertical to their field of specialization in Bitoon National Vocational High School- Dumanjug, Cebu. Furthermore, the research delves into the details through answering the following questions:

1. What are the struggles and challenges of the junior high school teachers handling subjects not vertical to their field of specialization?
2. What are their coping mechanisms and adjustment in handling this burden every day?
3. How do they enhance the way they deliver instruction to their learners?
4. Who do they turn to for assistance when they experience difficulties in delivering the lesson?
5. What recommendations can be made from their experiences?

### Literature Review

This part of research discusses various studies that focus on the teachers handling subjects which are not inclined to their field of specialization. It discusses their struggles and challenges, their coping

mechanisms, and their positive and negative perceptions. The researchers choose the numerous studies in order to supply a specific understanding of the teachers' experiences in teaching subjects not inclined to their field of specialization. Every article's content offers guidance and some explanations that are useful and have a huge influence on our current research.

According to the study of Rebucas (2022), teaching outside of specialized topics presents numerous challenges, and teachers raise concerns when dealing with the current situation. Educators' incompetence in teaching concepts was evident in the way they prepared lessons, detailed lesson plans, chose effective teaching strategies, addressed students' confusion, chose instructional materials, and related lectures to actual occurrences. These issues were most visible and prevalent in public schools, particularly those schools which struggle to find qualified teachers to teach specific subject areas.

Teachers may be responsible for classroom management, but they cannot effectively teach without a background in the subject (Franklin & Harrington, 2019; Bahinting et al., 2022). They might find it simple to establish productive working relationships with students, teach them how to learn in a classroom, manage and use time effectively, anticipate students' progress, or even set behavioral standards that support student learning, but they require plenty of time to plan their lessons and their teaching methods (Emia et al., 2022). It is therefore advisable to let professors handle topics in which they are experts.

Teaching subjects outside one's area of expertise is more difficult for new teachers due to lack of both experience and training (Rapanta et al., 2020). When beginning teachers are teaching non-major subjects, they do not establish a clear understanding, methodologies, or behavior (Sharplin, 2014). Teachers must understand the learners' learning process, and comprehend and cater to students' specific emotional and mental profiles, in order to involve, inspire, and teach all learners to the best of their abilities (Mangubat et al., 2022; Pableo et al., 2022). According to Stiggins (2018), learning assessment involves not only the assessment of students' character but also the pedagogical strategies and comprehension processes that enhance students' learning.

The study of Co et al. (2021) presented various implications of teaching subjects outside the specialization: (a) it complicates the educational

system, affecting students, workmates, parents and guardians, government agencies, and school authorities; (b) it puts an additional burden on school personnel management and endangers teaching and learning quality; and (c) it lowers the standard of instruction and has an influence on performance. (d) Furthermore, the teacher feels vulnerable and ineffective, there is a scarcity of teaching strategies, and it is tough to bring the topic alive for students due to the restricted expertise (Perez et al., 2022; Segarino et al., 2022). Because of these, the teachers would depend on traditional and ineffective teaching methods, such as relying entirely on the subject's textbook (Bayani & Guhao, 2017).

Though there are numerous negative consequences to teaching subjects unrelated to one's field of specialization, there are also some benefits. Some researchers are able to present positive contributions of teaching subjects not inclined to one's field of specialization. According to Bayani and Guhao, (2017), (a) Effective teachers study, perform, and communicate; they collaborate with other teachers; they carefully examine students' work; and they share what they observe: (b) teachers become versatile when assigned with subjects that are not their major-adaptable teacher attitudes are not only related to teacher stress and burnout, but also to students who see teachers as accountable and in control of their lessons; (c) and teachers become more innovative- which opens the door to sustained success. Also, Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) can be utilized. It entails people changing, adapting, and having the ability to learn new skills (Villar et al., 2022; Ugbamen et al., 2022). Teachers' flexibility to problems and obstacles in handling subjects outside of their area of expertise helps in relieving the situation (Ingersoll, 2019).

The variation between either desirable or undesirable knowledge is the amount of care, support, and respect a teacher gets, including the appreciation that handling non-major subjects is complicated and hard (Yamon et al., 2022). Meaningful learning in an out-of-field subject tends to require support from stakeholders and school leaders, and also time to expand content learning and teaching approaches. It's not like all schools have made these accommodations. Not even all governments could provide the necessary funds to finance teacher retraining (Melekhina & Kazachikhina, 2016).

The teachers handling subjects not vertical to their field of specialization in junior high school have confirmed that the impossible things can be made possible. Though there are lots of struggles and

challenges encountered in teaching subjects they are not experts at, they still manage to deliver the lessons. This happens with the help of their colleagues who specialized in such subjects. Also, they have lived by the saying, "once a teacher, always a student". Allotting ample time in preparing for the lessons has helped a lot. The gathered articles show studies that signify and highlight the struggles and challenges, and the positive and negative perceptions of teachers handling subjects not vertical to their specialization. May every finding and analysis of this study, supported by all of these pieces of writings contribute to a better understanding and sympathy for the precise occurrence encountered by these teachers.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study utilized Phenomenology as a research design. Phenomenology is a way of understanding the lived experiences of the participants in a certain identified phenomenon. The phenomenon that this study identified which is vertical articulation of specialization among the Junior High School Teachers can be best exemplified in an interpretative way of analyzing their individual realities.

### Sampling Technique

The participants in this study were being chosen using the purposive sampling method. The approach of selecting suitable participants in accordance with its inclusion criteria is known as "purposeful sampling." The inclusion criteria are as follows: (a) the participants should be junior high school teachers; (b) the participants should have the majority of their loads inclined with the subjects in the Junior High School Department, and (c) the subject(s) being assigned is/are not inclined with the teachers' field of specialization.

### Data Collection

The researchers created letters of consent and gave them to the participants, who were junior high school teachers handling subjects not inclined to their field of specialization. When the participants gave their approval, they were scheduled to be interviewed via an online platform. The participants have social media accounts such as Facebook and Messenger accounts, which were used by the researchers in scheduling and conducting an analysis. During the interview, a semi-structured questionnaire was used. Experts have

approved and validated the gadget that the researchers built. (Cabello & Bonotan, 2021). It was designed for teachers who were addressing subjects outside of their areas of expertise. Ethical guidelines set in this study were strictly followed during data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2007). All of the information gathered will be scrutinized and evaluated in line with the plan of the study.

### Research Rigor

To keep the study rigorous, the researchers followed the quality standards of Whitemore et al (2001). The quality standards were also evaluated in terms of (a) Credibility and Authenticity, and (b) Integrity and critical thinking. Additionally, the researcher's use of bracketing boosted the study's rigor (Cabello & Bonotan, 2021). In order to establish fairness and reduce prejudice in the course of the research, bracketing is necessary (Alase, 2017). Potential replies from all participants were expected in advance (Cabello et al., 2022).

### Ethical Considerations

The ten fundamental ethical standards outlined by Bryman and Bell were used in this study (2007). The research study was done in accordance with the following moral standards: (1) it is clear that the participants are not abused or compromised; (2) high regard for participants' courtesy and respect; (3) consent is freely given by participants without any mistreatment; (4) seclusion of any detail from participants; (5) data gathered from participants are handled with high confidentiality; (6) anonymity of identity and personality involved in the study; (7) avoiding exaggerations and providing accurate facts; (8) disclosing any financial information, including cash inflows and outflows, as necessary; (9) approaching participants with integrity and honesty; and (10) upholding strict neutrality throughout the course of the study.

### Data Analysis

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) focused on the Modified Van Kaam Approach popularized by Moustakas was used in this study. The seven tenets of data analysis began with the sorting of the participants' experiences, which is known as horizontalizing. The second was to start reducing the experiences into invariant constituents, with the researchers interpreting the highlights of the experiences. The third step was to cluster themes in order to generate its own central theme. The fourth

critical step was to compare data sources capable of validating the invariant constituents. The fifth step was to create an individual analysis of its textural descriptions. In the sixth step, the creation of the description of the data's composite structure began. And finally, all the lived experiences of the participants were synthesized and encapsulated.

## Results and Discussion

After interpreting the collected data, the researchers of this study identified three key themes: the unforeseen hustle, the contemporary aid, and the proposal. The three themes being discussed depict the real experiences of teachers handling subjects which are not vertical to their field of specialization.

### The Unforeseen Hustle

Teachers find it really difficult to handle subjects which are not vertical to their field of specialization. A lot of problems can be encountered since they are not equipped with enough knowledge and skills in teaching such subjects. This can present significant difficulties (Mizzi, 2021). Having less ideas about the topic can affect the teaching-learning process.

According to Bayani & Guhao (2017), teachers handling subjects not vertical to their field of specialization can bring about negative impact on student learning which can result to lower achievement scores. These unforeseen hustles showed thee personal struggles towards adjustment in teaching such subjects.

Participant #2 said that,  
 “We are not trained to teach topics that are not inlined to our major.”

This statement expresses the sentiment of the teacher who lacks trainings in teaching subjects not inline to the field of expertise. This can result to be uncertain on the things that are being discussed in class. You prepare for each class as if you were back in school. This requires a lot of effort on the part of the teacher for he should study like a student so he can fullfil the students' thirst for knowledge.

Participant #5 mentioned that,  
 “I spend more time in studying/preparing the subjects that are not my specialization. I am not confident in teaching the lesson. I am afraid to be asked questions that I cannot answer since it's not my specialization. I am not as enthusiastic as I teach the subject.”



It is really difficult to handle subjects that the teacher is not expert at. It can lessen the confidence since it can make the teacher unsure of the ideas and knowledge being shared. There will be times when students ask questions that the teacher can't answer (Bart, 2010). This is normal. Though the teacher is considered as a fountain of knowledge but it doesn't mean that he knows everything well. The most important thing is not faking it. It is even more important to establish a learning environment in which students are encouraged to ask good questions than it is to create one in which they believe the teacher is perfect.

Participant #6 said that,  
 "Mastery of the subject matter is the main problem."

Mastery of the topic allows teachers to correct misconceptions or incorrect knowledge that students may have. Without mastery, it makes the teachers hesitant on sharing the ideas and details because they are not mastered with the lesson (Rebucas, 2022). This makes mastery of the subject matter as the main problem in teaching such non-major subjects.

Participant #7 mentioned that,  
 "There are many struggles and challenges I face in my career as a teacher dealing with subjects that are not my specialty. First, I find it hard to cope up the lessons and some methods/strategies in teaching. Second, I need to study in advance the competencies and the respective topics so that I could give an input to the learners. Last, I become resourceful and creative in different ways."

In coping with the lessons and deciding on the teaching strategies to be used in the discussion, the teacher must allocate enough time. However, teachers are always busy in delivering the lesson, doing a lot of paper works, accomplishing reports and the like. It's difficult to manage every minute of the day, particularly when you're bombarded with distractions (Kashyap, 2023). It would be an additional problem for the teachers if there's a need for them to spend a lot of time preparing the lesson. They could have spent it doing other important matters. This means that teachers must manage their time wisely for it could help them a lot.

Participant #8 said that,  
 "The struggles and challenges of the junior high school teachers handling subjects that are not vertical to their field of specialization are as follows: a) hard to communicate especially in Filipino subject; b) hard to understand words or meaning in Filipino; c) hard to make Lesson Plan; and d) no trainings or seminars."

Communication is a major element in the teaching-learning process. It is described as the act of comprehending and disseminating meaning (Pearson & Nelson, 2000). This means that communication between the teacher and the students during the discussion must be clear and understandable. However, it is difficult for the teachers handling non-major subjects to attain it for they are struggling in understanding the meaning of some Filipino words. In this instance, communication is not effective. The teachers have to spend ample time in studying and familiarizing the meaning of some Filipino words.

### The Contemporary Aid

Teaching subjects not inline to their field of specialization is a difficult task for the teachers. It is giving them a hard time preparing for the subject. Hence, an alternative way of coping their insufficiency is practiced. Teachers can use technology to help students understand a subject better by converting long paragraphs or texts into visuals, graphs, flowcharts, or animated films (Shamim, et al, 2022). With the help of the contemporary aid, a difficult task can be realized.

Participant #1 mentioned that,  
 "Always prepare ahead of time by studying, since this will give you time to catch flaws and consider alternative teaching strategies. If given enough time to prepare the lessons, the fewer the burdens and errors will be."

According to Eidenburgh (2021), someone can make a difference in the world if he studies in advance. This means that the teacher can turn the impossible into possible if he gives time to study. It is really important to prepare the lessons before discussing it to the students to make sure that they only learn the correct information.

Participant #2 said,  
 "I personally asked teachers handling Filipino for their help and expertise."

One teacher who has difficulty in delivering the lesson in Filipino Language usually asks advise from someone who is an expert. Collective self-construction characterizes dependency in communal societies (Kocabiyik & Bacioglu, 2021). It's okay to be dependent to others or ask for help especially if the teacher is not expert in doing a certain thing.

Participant #7 mentioned that,  
 "The best mechanism that I could give in dealing this problem is being more creative, imaginative, and proactive."

Another technique that is helpful to be an effective teacher is to be creative in every way possible and being resourceful. According to Agić & Rešić (2015), creativity in teaching entails a continuous search for innovations in the educational process, new solutions, and the development of new and improved teaching programs. The teacher has to be initiative so he can deliver the lesson efficiently.

Participant #9 said,

"One way to overcome these struggles and challenges is to look for ready-made instructional materials which can be found on youtube and other learning resources and websites."

For many instances, the widespread use of the internet is utilized more frequently for internet has all the sources of information and has become more accessible to all. Self-directed exploratory inquiry via YouTube tutorial videos is one-way teachers have acquired skills (Ansaryam & Tan, 2021). It has become a great blessing to teachers teaching subjects other than their field of specialization.

### The Proposal

DepEd Ordinance No. 7 s 2015 is intended to institutionalize the main goals of basic education programs for K-12. This is to improve the overall quality of basic education in the country and fulfill the mission of educational institutions through the employment of highly qualified teachers (Republic Act No. 4670). To advance and enhance employment and career opportunities for public school teachers and attract more qualified individuals to the teaching profession, the Department of Education (DepEd) recognizes that the accomplishment of an education system is highly dependent on the proficiency of its teachers. Therefore, one of the key issues the department hopes to address through the application of the K-12 basic education law is how to manage non-specialized subject teachers. The recommendation is reduced to three: hire the needed teachers only; conduct relevant training; and teach a specialized subject.

Participant #1 mentioned that,

"The DepEd officials have to address this problem by hiring teachers who have degrees in the necessary fields. Also, they need to look at the number of teachers per school who teach other subjects to address this concern".

Qualified teaching applicants who got at least 70 points after the evaluation and the validation of the documents are ranked on the Registry of Qualified

Applicants (RQA). Being hired and advised to work in a public school does not guarantee you to teach only your major subjects, but to handle other than that if there are no other specialized teachers handling these or many teachers are hired with the same specialization. However, it can be less avoided if DepEd officials coordinate and deliberate first with the school administrator before hiring and assigning teachers to a school provided that the Teachers Need Analysis Matrix (TNAM) was taken into consideration.

Participant #2 said,

"Teachers are certainly adaptable, but we are also human beings. We have limitations. Hire teachers as much as possible or conduct trainings to teachers who are handling subjects other than their major."

Some teachers in the public schools are given subjects to handle that are not in line with their major of specialization, but they accepted the subjects, tried to be versatile in many ways, and began to look for ways to deliver well the competencies intended to achieve. It is the Department of Education's goal that all teachers become not only efficient but also effective. But it would not be promising and reassuring to say that an English major teacher is effective in handling and teaching Science classes however it would be helpful for teachers to undergo relevant trainings and seminars to improve and develop the craft of each educator in school.

Participant #4 mentioned that,

"I recommend that teachers must be given subject loads that are vertical to their field of specialization. However, if dili malikayan (if it can't be avoided), the division office must provide support programs to help teachers grasp new methods and concepts in the field/s which they have to teach."

As much as possible, teachers must be given loads that are related to their major. It would be an ease to the teachers and eustressful as well, knowing that they are practicing their competence in the teaching world, however if it is beyond control, DepEd Cebu Province should provide free support programs to elevate the knowledge of the teachers. According to Uche (1981), "To facilitate and maximize the discovered skills of teaching, teachers should undergo in-service trainings. For him, this will enable teachers to acquire mastery of new skills and to be abreast with new knowledge.

The lives of teachers who handle and teach subjects that are not directly related to their field of specialization are difficult because several adjustments and efforts must be made in order to provide students

with accurate information and successfully deliver lessons. The data gathered from the participants provided a better understanding of why some teachers struggle and become problematic in delivering lessons, particularly those topics with which they are unfamiliar. Dealing with this type of phenomenon requires full attention from higher officials in education, as well as various strategies to cope with and solve this ongoing problem. Hiring qualified, competent, and expert teachers to ensure that students learn a lot from them is one solution. If this cannot be avoided, these teachers must receive adequate training and seminars, as well as ready-made materials.

## Conclusion

The participants' lived experiences with teaching subjects not directly related to their expertise highlight the fact that their teaching experience is fraught with unforeseen difficulties. And that modern aid is crucial in their lives during these times. For them to overcome all of these, they should tell themselves that they can handle and teach such subjects. They need to believe in themselves, be adaptable, and allocate time to prepare for the lessons. The study recommends that teachers must not be given subjects in which they are not experts, but if this cannot be avoided, teachers must be provided with adequate training, seminars, and support. Also, more research is needed to address the difficulties faced by teachers who teach subjects that are not directly related to their area of expertise.

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