**Original Research Article**

**ECHOING THE VOICES OF TEACHERS BEYOND SPECIALIZATION: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NON-TLE TEACHERS IN TEACHING TLE SUBJECTS**

**ABSTRACT**

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| Out-of-field teaching has been a common problem in many countries. Teaching outside their area of specialization can profoundly affect their instructional effectiveness, as they are essentially novices in that subject. This study explored the lived experiences of non-TLE teachers teaching Technical and Livelihood Education (TLE) subjects. It sought to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and explore the coping strategies they employ to navigate the challenges they face. This study utilized a phenomenological approach as its research design. The data were gathered from three (3) participants through In-depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Results revealed that participants' experiences in the study emerged into two main themes: Teaching Beyond the Comfort Zone and Struggles to Meet Teaching Demands. Meanwhile, regarding coping with the challenges encountered by the non-TLE teachers teaching TLE subjects, two main themes were formulated: Collaborative Growth in the Face of Resource Challenges and Turning Doubt into Growth. The findings indicate that non-TLE teachers encountered significant challenges while teaching TLE subjects outside their area of expertise. These challenges included a lack of specialized knowledge, insufficient resources, and limited access to necessary equipment. This study highlights non-TLE teachers' challenges when teaching outside their expertise, including limited resources, insufficient knowledge, and pressure to adapt to new curriculum demands. To address these challenges, collaboration, professional development, mentorship, and technology integration are crucial to empowering non-TLE teachers and ensuring quality education delivery in TLE subjects. |

*Keywords: Non-TLE teachers, out-of-field teaching*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Out-of-field teaching—assigning teachers to subjects outside their specialization—can reduce student engagement, limit content knowledge, and strain resources (Mercado & Morante, 2024). Schools often resort to hiring such teachers due to a shortage of specialists, but this fails to address the underlying issue. The problem is compounded by underqualified hires and a lack of qualified personnel. Unlike students randomly assigned to classes, less qualified teachers face challenges that affect professionalism, student safety, learning outcomes, instructional quality, and their professional identity (Nakar & Du Plessis, 2023; Carothers et al., 2019).

Due to the “structural teacher shortage” issue in many primary schools, which hinders these teachers’ professional development, there have been many instances of out-of-field teaching in China in recent years (Ma, 2024). Furthermore, due to insufficient training and credentials, teachers in Canada encounter difficulties when instructing students in subjects outside of their areas of expertise. This can hinder their ability to teach those subjects effectively (Hobbs & Porsch, 2021).

In Kidwalan, Davao del Sur, non-TLE teachers assigned to TLE subjects struggle due to lack of expertise and insufficient resources (Tingzon & Buyok, 2022). Similarly, in Cebu City, unqualified social studies teachers face challenges in lesson planning and delivery (Pacana et al., 2019). According to the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2), 62% of educators teach subjects outside their college major (Press Release - EDCOM 2, 2024).

Furthermore, in the locality of Tagum City Davao del Norte, non-TLE teachers are teaching TLE subjects despite not possessing all the competencies of a fully qualified TLE teacher. Some acquired TLE competencies through experiences, peer tutorials, self-study, social media and other technology. Despite these initiatives, teachers remain problematic (Tingzon & Buyok, 2022). A mismatch between duties and abilities in the position negatively affects the macroeconomic and microeconomic productivity levels at work (Taripe, 2024).

The researchers perceive a dearth of research on the challenges faced by non-TLE teachers instructing TLE topics in Tagum City Davao del Norte. This research must immediately be done, since employing teachers who are not specialists in their field can impede the delivery of high-quality instruction. This study aims to advance knowledge about the challenges faced by non-TLE teachers and their coping mechanisms.

This study, like others, explores the experiences of non-TLE educators teaching outside their specialization. While past research highlights emotional struggles and calls for systemic reform, this study focuses on practical challenges such as inadequate preparation, curriculum demands, limited resources, and shifting self-efficacy. Unlike broader analyses, it aims to improve teaching effectiveness and job satisfaction within the existing educational framework.

**2. OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of non-TLE teachers teaching TLE subjects. Specifically, this research sought to answer the following questions: 1. What are the experiences of non-TLE teachers in teaching TLE subjects? 2. What strategies did the school employ to support non-TLE teachers to effectively teach the TLE subject? 3. How do teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy and career interests shift when assigned TLE subjects outside their area of expertise?

**3. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of non-TLE teachers teaching TLE subjects. Qualitative research focuses on context, perspective, and meaning to interpret complex social phenomena (Lim, 2024). Phenomenology seeks to understand the universal essence of a phenomenon by examining individuals’ lived experiences while setting aside researchers’ biases (H, 2023).

**Research Instruments**

The primary research instrument used in this study was an interview guide composed of open-ended questions aimed at gathering insights from non-TLE teachers handling TLE subjects in the Division of Tagum City.

**Respondents of the Study**

The study involved teachers from the Division of Tagum City, Department of Education (DepEd), who hold a baccalaureate degree and have at least two to three years of experience teaching TLE subjects. Both male and female teachers were included as participants.

**Data Gathering**

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 3–5 participants facilitated in-depth qualitative data through focused conversations (Masriwati et al., 2024; Pérez & Pérez, 2024). Before interviews, approvals were secured, the Interview Guide validated, and informed consent obtained, including permission for audio recording.

Interviews addressed three main research questions with follow-up probes, conducted face-to-face in private settings with confidentiality ensured via data encryption and anonymization. FGDs followed established ground rules for respectful dialogue. Post-interview, researchers applied Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase coding, transcribing, translating, verifying, and organizing data by topic.

**4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The researchers transcribed and translated recordings using McMullin’s (2021) method. A focus group discussion (FGD) supported data triangulation. Analysis followed three stages—data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing—with rigorous verification. Transcriptions highlighted participants’ perspectives to ensure reliability and validity. Guided by their mentor, the researchers applied data reduction techniques (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2012) to condense the qualitative data for analysis.

**Themes and Sub Themes generated for Research Question No. 1.**

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*Figure 1 Emergent Themes, Categories, and Codes on the Lived Experiences of Non-TLE Teachers Teaching TLE Subjects.*

**RQ.1 What are the experiences of non-TLE teachers teaching TLE subjects?**

**Lived Experiences of Non-TLE Teachers Teaching TLE Subjects.**

Figure 1 presents the emergent themes, categories, and codes derived from the lived experiences of non-TLE teachers tasked with teaching TLE subjects. The overarching theme is that these educators often find themselves beyond their Comfort Zone.

**Theme 1: Beyond the Comfort Zone**

Non-TLE teachers, assigned to unfamiliar roles, are pushed beyond their comfort zones, taking on new challenges and developing unexpected skills. They often struggle with balancing added responsibilities, lack of subject expertise, and fear of failure.

**Category 1: Staffing Shortage and Subject Flexibility**

The shortage of TLE teachers has led schools to assign non-TLE teachers to cover technical-vocational subjects, despite their limited expertise. This highlights the growing need for teacher flexibility and adaptability. Two codes emerged under this category: Shortage of TLE Teachers and Unchosen Opportunities.

**Shortage of TLE Teachers**

The ongoing shortage of TLE teachers affects the quality of technical-vocational education, limiting students’ access to hands-on learning and practical skill development. Contributing factors include teacher turnover, changes in curricula and student-teacher ratios, and challenges in recruiting and retaining educators in specialized fields (Sutcher et al., 2019). This was confirmed by the participants (IDI-1, FGD\_1, IDI\_2, FGD\_2)

A lack of qualified TLE teachers significantly impacts the quality of vocational education. Generelao et al. (2021) highlight that teacher quality is essential for student learning, while Antera (2023) notes that fewer specialized instructors limit hands-on training. Castro (2022) adds that such shortages impact school operations, staff morale, and student performance, leaving students less prepared for the workforce.

**Unchosen Opportunities**

Economic pressures often push teachers to take on TLE roles outside their expertise, with those trained in subjects like English, Science, or Math being reassigned, as stated by the participants (IDI\_2, IDI\_3). Despite their commitment, a lack of subject-specific training can affect teaching quality and student readiness. Tran (2023) observes that while attitudes vary, teaching unfamiliar subjects remains a challenge.

Teachers assigned outside their specialization often lack the content expertise needed for effective instruction, resulting in less engaging lessons and misaligned assessments. This can hinder student performance. Hobbs & Porsch (2021) emphasize that such challenges affect teachers at all career stages, requiring significant effort to adapt and meet subject demands.

**Category 2: Struggling with Boundaries**

Non-TLE teachers face the challenge of balancing increased responsibilities with limited subject-specific knowledge and skills. Despite lacking formal training, they feel pressured to deliver quality TLE instruction. Limited access to resources, time, and support further hampers their ability to grow in the role.

**Progress Wrapped in Pressure**

The challenges of adapting to unfamiliar content and assessments often result in stress, anxiety, and burnout as confirmed by the participants (IDI\_1, IDI\_2, IDI\_3). Von Der Embse et al. (2019) link these pressures, intensified by test-based accountability, to absenteeism, negative school climate, and behavioral problems.

Thrust into new roles, they must quickly learn complex concepts while ensuring instructional quality, leading to stress. Culajara (2023) highlights the importance of embracing change, supported by ongoing training to build confidence and competence.

**Learning Through Limits**

As Cheruiyot (2024) notes, a lack of confidence and skills in teaching new curricula can result in confusion for both teachers and students, underscoring the need for targeted support and training.

Non-TLE teachers often face challenges with unfamiliar terms and tools, requiring self-study and peer support to adapt. Arendain & Limpot (2022) note that, despite early struggles, they improve over time by developing strategies and using English to convey concepts clearly.

**Themes, Sub Themes, and Codes generated for the Research Question No. 1. EXPERIENCES**

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*Figure 2 Emergent Themes, Categories, and Codes on the Lived Experiences of Non-TLE Teachers Teaching TLE Subjects.*

**RQ.1 What are the experiences of non-TLE teachers teaching TLE subjects?**

**Lived Experiences of Non-TLE Teachers Teaching TLE Subjects.**

Two categories emerged: Teaching Amidst Curriculum and Resource Constraints and Struggling with Teaching Limitations. These highlight issues such as inadequate resources, misaligned curricula, and limited training, all of which hinder teachers’ ability to deliver quality instruction and meet subject-specific demands.

**Theme 2: Struggling to Meet Teaching Demands**

Participants described feeling overwhelmed by the demands of the TLE curriculum and the lack of resources. Frustration stemmed from insufficient training and support, making it difficult to address diverse learners’ needs effectively.

**Category 1: Teaching Amidst Curriculum and Resource Constraints**

Participants reported major challenges in implementing the TLE curriculum due to a lack of resources, particularly reference materials for technical terms. This made it difficult to explain concepts clearly and assess students’ performance on specialized tasks.

**Bridging curriculum challenges**

Participants emphasized the difficulty of adapting to the new TLE curriculum, particularly due to limited time for learning and preparation (Pak et al., 2020), as shared by participants (IDI\_2 and IDI\_3). The lack of adequate references, especially for technical terms, further hindered their ability to explain concepts clearly and effectively to students.

Maffea (2020) emphasizes that inadequate resources create stress and hinder learning, underscoring the need for sufficient materials and targeted professional development.

Frequent curriculum changes pose challenges for teachers, making it hard to adapt strategies and plans. Thi et al. (2023) note that such transitions can affect teaching quality and professional growth.

**Limited Resources and Teaching Strategies**

Participants (IDI\_2, IDI\_3) shared limited time and insufficient administrative support affected their ability to create quality resources and assess technical tasks effectively (Jr & Sumeg-ang, 2023). As a result, teachers often used self-made materials from online sources, though these were not always curriculum aligned.

Teachers face difficulties implementing the new curriculum due to a lack of reference materials, especially for technical terms, making concept explanation harder (Ana et al., 2023). They also struggle to grade performance tasks outside their expertise and feel overwhelmed by the workload of creating and contextualizing instructional materials.

**Category 2: Struggling with teaching limitations**

Non-TLE teachers assigned to TLE faced challenges adapting to hands-on teaching and working beyond their expertise. They adjusted strategies, addressed diverse student needs, and relied on creativity and experience to deliver quality instruction despite limitations.

**Struggling with New Methods**

Participants (IDI\_1 and IDI\_2) shared challenges in adapting to TLE’s hands-on approach, often departing from traditional methods. Limited materials and equipment restricted practical lessons, leading teachers to rely on outdated strategies (Tingzon & Buyok, 2022). Teaching outside one’s specialization, such as in TLE, requires educators to adapt their methods to meet curriculum demands. Limited resources often hinder effective instruction (Canoy et al., 2022).

**Innovating Strategies to Meet Students' Diverse Needs**

Participants felt uncertain and doubtful about teaching outside their expertise, but saw it as a learning opportunity IDI\_1 and IDI\_3). Despite the steep learning curve, they embraced continuous skill development (Grünwald, 2021).

Many experiences self-doubt, questioning their ability to teach unfamiliar subjects (Tran, 2023; Zaid et al., 2020). Still, this struggle can lead to professional growth as educators develop new strategies and expand their skills.

A shortage of subject specialists often forces teachers into roles they’re unprepared for, increasing stress and affecting learning quality. Limited resources and training make it harder to adopt innovative methods. Supporting diverse learners, especially those with special needs, requires institutional backing, family involvement, and ongoing professional development (Damyanov, 2024).

**Themes, Sub-Themes and Codes generated for the Research Question No. 2. COPING MECHANISMS**

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*Figure 3 Emergent Themes, Categories, and Codes on the Strategies Employ to Support Non-TLE Teachers in Effectively Teaching TLE Subjects.*

**RQ. 2 What strategies did the school employ to support non-TLE teachers to effectively teach the TLE subject?**

**Strategies Employed to Support Non-TLE Teachers in Effectively Teaching TLE Subjects.**

Knowledge Sharing Through Collaboration emphasizes the importance of educators collaborating to share their expertise. Professional Development and Support highlights the need for ongoing training and mentoring to prepare non-TLE teachers. Resource Management and Support Limitations stresses innovative strategies to maximize resources and support their specific needs.

**Theme 1: Collaborative Growth in the Face of Resource Challenges**

Sharing expertise, lesson plans, and innovative techniques allows teachers to pool resources, reduce workload, and foster a supportive learning environment. They also highlighted the value of collaborative professional development, such as workshops and peer observations, to improve teaching skills and knowledge.

**Category 1: Knowledge Sharing through Collaboration**

Participants highlighted the important role of collaborative platforms such as LAC sessions, FGDs, and SLACs in promoting knowledge sharing. These forums enabled teachers, especially TLE and non-TLE educators, to exchange ideas, strategies, and experiences.

**Knowledge Sharing**

Participants (IDI\_1 and IDI\_3) emphasized the importance of peer-to-peer learning and mentorship in acquiring knowledge and developing skills. The involvement of senior high school TVL teachers in providing guidance and sharing expertise was seen as a crucial factor in enhancing the participants' knowledge base.

Collaborative learning includes various group-based strategies like peer tutoring, team-based, and problem-based learning (Yang, 2023). Teacher-centered collaboration supports meaningful discussions on instruction and student learning (Dejong et al., 2022), but without proper facilitation, its impact may be limited.

Programs like SLAC help but face issues like time constraints and lack of support. Enhancing collaboration and professional development requires better planning, resources, and ongoing teacher support (Barksdale et al., 2021).

**Collaborative Teaching and Learning (CTL)**

Participants (IDI\_1 and IDI\_2) highlighted the value of collaborative platforms, specifically LAC sessions, FGDs, and SLACs, in facilitating knowledge sharing among teachers. These forums enabled the exchange of ideas, strategies, and experiences, particularly between TLE and non-TLE educators.

Collaborative Teaching and Learning (CTL) plays a key role in professional development, especially for TVL and non-TVL teachers. Platforms like LAC sessions, FGDs, and SLACs promote knowledge sharing and skill enhancement (Culajara, 2023).

**Category 2: Professional Development and Support**

Participants emphasized mentoring and TESDA programs as vital to professional development. Mentoring by experienced TLE teachers offered valuable guidance, while TESDA programs provided opportunities for skill and knowledge enhancement, supporting overall growth.

**Participation in TESDA Programs**

These programs offered opportunities for professional growth and development as shared by the participants (IDI\_1 and IDI\_2). The ability to effectively convert information and knowledge into novel goods and services will characterize prosperous organizational economies (Cataraja & Cataraja, 2022).

Teachers acknowledge TESDA programs’ potential but question their quality, relevance, and applicability. Alignment with teaching roles and workloads is uncertain. Edralin & Pastrana (2023) stress that Philippine TVET curricula must align with the 2022–2028 Development Plan and Industry 4.0 to meet SDG #4. Abdallah & Alkaabi (2023) recommend tailoring TESDA programs to TLE teachers’ needs and providing ongoing support to ensure effective classroom integration and improved instruction.

**Mentoring**

Participants (IDI\_2 and IDI\_3) emphasized that mentoring from experienced TLE teachers is vital for professional growth. Out-of-field teaching demands proper training, mentoring, resources, and support networks to address pedagogical, technological, and content challenges, improving teacher effectiveness (Nob & Tañola, 2024).

Mentoring is vital for the professional growth of TLE teachers, as experienced mentors provide guidance and support (Belavina & Klyuchko, 2024). However, time and resource limitations can hinder its effectiveness.

**Category 3: Resource Management and Support Limitations**

Participants cited limited support and budget constraints as key challenges in technical-vocational education. Though SLAC sessions and mentorship were the main supports, they often failed to meet non-TLE teachers’ varied needs. Budget limits also hindered access to equipment, materials, and professional development, affecting effective TLE program delivery.

**Challenges with Budget Constraints**

Education funding has been repeatedly reviewed to address misallocation and better support specific needs (Treto-French, 2024). Budget constraints significantly hinder TLE and non-TLE teachers by limiting professional development, essential materials, and the creation of effective learning environments as shared by the participants (IDI\_1, IDI\_2 and IDI\_3).

Out-of-field teaching, often driven by financial constraints, adversely affects student outcomes and education quality. Effective policies requiring teacher certification in their fields are needed (Du Plessis, 2020). Budget constraints highlight the need for efficient resource distribution and creative solutions to improve education without increasing costs (Garbuzova et al., 2024).

**Limited Support**

Participants identified the limited support activities available to non-TLE teachers, mainly relying on SLAC sessions and mentorship programs (IDI\_1, IDI\_2, and IDI\_3). These were often insufficient to address their specific needs.

Though SLAC sessions and mentoring support professional growth, teachers noted limited help for non-TLE educators. Activities like SLACs and FGDs often don't meet their varied needs. Specialized workshops, coaching, and resources could boost effectiveness. Gamboa (2023) recommends enhancing SLACs through balanced workloads, innovation, and improved monitoring.

**Themes, Sub Themes and Codes generated for Research Question No. 3. INSIGHTS**

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*Figure 4 Emergent Themes, Categories, and Codes on the Teachers’ Perceptions of Self-Efficacy and Career Interests Shift When Assigned to Teach TLE Subjects.*

**RQ. 3 How do teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy and career interests shift when assigned TLE subjects outside their area of expertise?**

**Teachers’ Perceptions of Self-Efficacy and Career Interests Shift When Assigned to Teach TLE Subjects.**

With their newfound confidence, teachers broadened their career interests and found renewed purpose through practical, hands-on activities. This shift underscores how out-of-field assignments can foster unexpected growth and deepen understanding of teaching’s multifaceted nature.

**Theme 1: Turning Doubt into Growth**

By embracing discomfort and stepping outside their comfort zones, they built confidence and broadened their career perspectives. This highlights the resilience and adaptability of teachers who learned to thrive in unfamiliar roles.

**Category 1: Growing Through Discomfort**

Participants noted that growth often arises from discomfort, viewing out-of-field teaching as a valuable learning experience. Facing these challenges helped them build new skills, life competencies, and greater self-efficacy, supporting both personal and professional development.

**Uncomfortable Progress**

Participants (IDI\_1, and IDI\_2) acknowledged the importance of embracing discomfort as a catalyst for growth. They highlighted that personal and professional development can occur in various situations outside one's comfort zone.

The belief that growth can occur anywhere is idealistic but often unrealistic for educators facing such challenges, leading to frustration and burnout. Out-of-field teachers, in particular, struggle with professional development due to broad subject demands, negative attitudes, and low self-confidence, making it difficult to adapt and succeed (Ma, 2024). Many educators report that traditional PD lacks sufficient preparation time and fails to support the use of evidence-based strategies in the classroom (Wong et al., 2022).

**Shift in Self-Efficacy**

Participants (IDI\_1 and IDI\_3) noted that taking on new challenges positively impacted their self-efficacy. According to Arias-Pastor et al. (2024), teachers with strong self-efficacy are more open to new ideas, use innovative methods, plan effectively, and teach with greater enthusiasm.

Teaching outside one’s specialization offers growth but also challenges, including stress, self-doubt, and lower instructional quality without proper support. Regier (2021) notes this can impact teacher confidence, highlighting the need for thoughtful curriculum design.

**Category 2: Progress in the Face of Self-Doubt**

Despite initial self-doubt, non-TLE teachers persisted in their efforts to teach TLE subjects. As they gained experience and confidence, they developed a stronger sense of professional identity and a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of teaching.

**Pushed to Progress**

Despite initial self-doubt, participants (IDI\_1 and IDI\_2) were motivated to embrace the challenges of teaching TLE subjects. Almerez et al. (2019) note that TLE teachers demonstrate resilience and dedication, often collaborating and utilizing resources to overcome obstacles. While it broadens their view of the profession, this growth often comes with the challenge of leaving their comfort zone without adequate support, leading to feelings of being overwhelmed and underprepared.

**Self-Doubt**

While many non-TLE teachers experienced a sense of growth and empowerment, others struggled with feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty (IDU\_1, IDI\_2 and IDI\_3). These doubts can hinder professional development and impact overall job satisfaction.

Teaching outside one’s specialization can cause self-doubt and lower confidence, especially without adequate support. Brushkova et al. (2020) highlight that declining status, mistrust, and diverse student needs increase this uncertainty. Such challenges may prompt teachers to question their career paths.

**5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Non-TLE teachers in selected schools around Tagum City, Davao del Norte, experienced both positive and negative aspects of teaching TLE. Key challenges included staffing shortages, limited subject flexibility, and resource constraints.
2. These teachers struggled with TLE content and assessment practices due to unfamiliarity, particularly with performance-based tasks and the practical nature of the curriculum.
3. Their professional identity and self-efficacy were impacted, as many felt uncertain about their ability to deliver quality instruction despite mentorship and peer support.
4. Teachers showed resilience by using online resources, adapting materials, and learning independently. However, limited budgets—especially in smaller schools—restricted access to essential tools and technology.
5. Overall, the study highlights the complexity of teaching outside one’s specialization and emphasizes the need for continuous learning, adaptability, and strong institutional support to help non-TLE teachers succeed.

**Recommendations**

1. Schools should implement structured mentorship, team teaching, and regular knowledge-sharing sessions to support non-TLE teachers and foster collaboration.
2. Targeted professional development—through workshops, seminars, and online training—should focus on TLE-specific content and pedagogy to build teacher confidence and competence.
3. Teachers are encouraged to use resources creatively, integrate digital tools, and engage in reflective practices to enhance resilience and self-efficacy.
4. School leaders should recognize non-TLE teachers’ efforts through incentives, public acknowledgment, and improved access to instructional resources. Subject-specific networks can support ongoing collaboration.
5. Strategic workforce planning and hiring aligned with teachers' expertise should be prioritized. Budget allocations must ensure equitable access to materials for performance-based subjects like TLE.
6. DepEd is encouraged to align teacher assignments with specialization, address staffing shortages through better recruitment and retention, and offer training for non-TLE teachers teaching TLE.
7. DepEd may also support professional learning communities and provide updated materials and technologies. Regular assessments of teacher credentials and classroom needs should guide policy decisions.
8. Future research should broaden the study beyond Tagum City to include more schools in Davao del Norte and explore the long-term effects of teaching outside one's specialization.
9. Investigating the reasons behind subject misassignments can offer insights into recruitment practices and reinforce the need for subject-aligned staffing to uphold education quality.

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