



Teaching beyond Specialization: Pedagogical Competencies of Teachers Handling Other Subjects

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Abstract		Review Article
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This study investigated the pedagogical competencies of non-specialized Junior High School teachers teaching Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (ESP) or Values Education, Araling Panlipunan (AP), and MAPEH in selected public secondary schools. It specifically evaluated the level of pedagogical competencies in the areas of content knowledge and pedagogy, learning environment, curriculum and planning, assessment and reporting, and personal and professional development; analyzed the extent of challenges faced; and examined significant differences in pedagogical competencies based on profile variables. The research utilized a descriptive-inferential quantitative methodology. Data were collected via a structured Likert-scale instrument and analyzed using the median to assess levels of competencies and challenges, along with non-parametric tests to identify significant differences among profile variables. The findings indicated that non-specialized teachers exhibited a high level of pedagogical competencies across all domains. However, they experienced a moderate level of challenges, especially concerning subject mastery and the curriculum requirements linked to teaching outside their area of specialization. Statistical analysis indicated no significant differences in pedagogical competencies when categorized by selected profile variables. The findings indicate that although non-specialized teachers can fulfill their instructional responsibilities effectively, persistent subject misalignment may continue to pose instructional challenges. The study highlights the significance of subject-aligned teacher deployment, focused retooling programs, and tailored professional development initiatives. It also emphasizes the necessity for strategic recruitment of teachers with suitable subject specializations and the establishment of formal retooling opportunities to strengthen instructional quality in contexts affected by teaching beyond specialization.

Keywords: Non-specialized teachers; Pedagogical competencies; Teaching beyond specialization; Subject-aligned teacher deployment; Teacher retooling programs.

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Introduction

Globally, the phenomenon of teachers handling subjects outside their area of specialization, hereafter referred to as non-specialized teachers (also

known in literature as out-of-field teachers) (Ingersoll, 2012) has long been linked to reduced teacher confidence and instructional effectiveness. Studies affirm that effective teaching requires strong

pedagogical competencies, combining content knowledge, instructional strategies, classroom management, and assessment practices (Shulman, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 2010). International research further highlights that such competencies are crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education (Jumawan & Fabiania, 2025; Madrid & Oco, 2025).

In the Philippines, the problem takes on a very concrete form. The EDCOM II Year Two Report (2025) revealed that around 62% of high school teachers are teaching subjects beyond their specialization. This mismatch creates visible gaps in instruction, especially in areas like MAPEH, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (ESP) or Values Education, and Araling Panlipunan, where teachers often face challenges in content mastery. Studies by Oracion (2018) and Aljibe (2019) point to similar findings: non-specialized teachers frequently rely on ready-made materials and struggle to deliver lessons with depth and confidence. Recognizing these realities, the Department of Education (DepEd, 2019) has underscored the need for continuous professional development to better equip teachers for the demands of diverse classroom assignments. In Region II, Bernardo (2017) found that students in Nueva Vizcaya achieved lower outcomes when taught by non-specialized teachers, a finding that highlights how deeply this issue affects learning.

While studies have documented the national situation, no localized analysis has yet examined how non-specialized teachers in Santiago City demonstrate pedagogical competence or cope with subject misalignment. In Santiago City, this challenge remains underexplored. Many Junior High School teachers continue to be assigned to teach MAPEH, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (ESP), or Values Education, and Araling Panlipunan even when their specialization lies elsewhere. School administrators often make such assignments to address teacher shortages, yet little is known about how these non-specialized teachers cope, how competent they perceive themselves to be, or what specific challenges they encounter in teaching outside their field.

This gap in local research and understanding

justifies the present study. By examining the pedagogical competencies and challenges of non-specialized Junior High School teachers in Santiago City, this study aims to provide empirical evidence that can guide teacher deployment decisions, inform targeted professional development, and contribute to improving the quality of instruction in the Division and beyond.

Methods

This study utilized a descriptive-inferential quantitative research design. The main objective is to describe the pedagogical competencies and challenges encountered by 102 non-specialized Junior High School teachers handling MAPEH, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (ESP) or Values Education, and Araling Panlipunan in the public schools of SDO Santiago City (SY 2025-2026). Stratified sampling was used in this study, in which respondents were grouped into relevant strata based on selected profile variables (e.g., sex, years of experience, or subject handled), and participants were proportionally selected from each stratum to ensure adequate representation across categories. Teachers from the elementary and senior high school levels will not be included in the study. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire developed to assess the pedagogical competencies and challenges of non-specialized Junior High School teachers handling MAPEH, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (ESP), and Araling Panlipunan in SDO Santiago City. The questionnaire was adapted from validated instruments used in previous studies (Shulman, 1987; Oracion, 2018; Bernardo, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2010) and aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST, DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017) to ensure relevance to current national standards. Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The data were encoded and summarized using the median to find out the level of pedagogical competences across five domains and the degree of challenges encountered, corresponding with the ordinal nature of Likert-scale data. Non-parametric statistical tests were utilized to examine significant differences in pedagogical competencies

when respondents were grouped according to selected profile variables. Ethical considerations, including informed of the study’s purpose, and

informed consent and confidentiality, were observed throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Test of Difference on the Level of Pedagogical Competencies of Non-specialized Teachers When They are Grouped by Profile

Domain	Median	Sex	Age	Educational Attainment	Field of Specialization	Years of Teaching Experience	Subject Currently Handled
Content Knowledge and Pedagogy	4.00	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	s
Learning Environment	4.00	s	s	ns	ns	s	ns
Curriculum and Planning	4.00	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	s
Assessment and Reporting	4.00	s	ns	ns	ns	ns	s
Personal and Professional Development	4.00	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	s
Challenges	3.00	s	ns	ns	s	s	ns

p-value ≤ 0.05 is significant (s)

Regarding Content Knowledge and Pedagogy, non-specialized teachers reported a high level of competency with a median score of 4.00. In addressing the research question on differences based on profile, the statistical analysis reveals that variables such as sex, age, and years of experience do not yield significant differences, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis for these factors. However, a significant difference was observed when teachers were grouped by the Subject Currently Handled ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that while foundational teaching strategies are stable, the

specific content of subjects like MAPEH or Araling Panlipunan presents unique demands. This finding is strongly supported by Shulman’s (1987) Theory of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which argues that effective teaching requires the ability to transform specific subject matter into instruction.

Furthermore, recent studies by Madrid and Oco (2025) and Jumawan and Fabiania (2025) emphasize that content mastery remains the most volatile variable for out-of-field teachers. An unexpected inconsistency arises here: while teachers rate their competency as high, they later identify

limited content knowledge as a challenge. This suggests a "perceived-actual" gap where teachers feel confident in the act of teaching but acknowledge a lack of specialized depth.

In the domain of Learning Environment and Diversity of Learners, non-specialized teachers demonstrated a high level of pedagogical competency, with a median score of 4.00 (Strongly Agree). This indicates that teachers perceive themselves as capable of creating safe, organized, and inclusive classroom environments that support effective learning among diverse students. Statistical analysis revealed significant differences in terms of sex, age, and years of teaching experience, indicating that these demographic and experiential factors may influence how teachers manage and facilitate the learning environment. Differences in maturity, perspectives, and professional exposure may contribute to variations in classroom management practices and strategies for supporting learners. But on the other hand, no significant differences were found in educational attainment, field of specialization, and subject currently handled, suggesting that the ability to establish a supportive learning environment remains a core pedagogical competency regardless of academic background or teaching assignment.

This implies that teachers in SDO Santiago City generally uphold the standards of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) in promoting safe and inclusive learning environments. Discussing these findings through a theoretical lens, the results support the assertions of Darling-Hammond (2021), who posits that robust pedagogical skills in managing the learning environment serve as a critical "safety net," ensuring that students are not disadvantaged even when a teacher lacks subject-specific specialization. The high scores across all demographics indicate that teachers prioritize the socio-emotional and physical aspects of the classroom as a baseline for effective instruction.

However, a potential limitation or source of error in this data is the reliance on self-reporting, where teachers may perceive their environment management as high to align with professional

expectations. While the data shows no statistical variance, future research could benefit from direct classroom observations to validate whether these high perceived competencies translate into actual classroom climate improvements and student engagement

In the domain of Curriculum and Planning, non-specialized teachers exhibited a high level of competency, maintaining a median score of 4.00. Regarding the research question on significant differences based on profile, the statistical analysis reveals that factors such as sex, age, educational attainment, and years of experience do not yield significant differences, thus supporting the null hypothesis for these variables. However, a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) was found when teachers were grouped by the Subject Currently Handled. This indicates that while the general ability to plan a lesson is a transferable skill, the specific requirement to align activities with the learning standards of an unfamiliar subject (such as MAPEH, AP, or ESP) introduces a layer of complexity that varies across disciplines. This finding aligns with the EDCOM II Year Two Report (2025), which emphasizes that subject mismatch often creates visible gaps in how teachers master and plan for specific content areas. It further supports the assertions of Darling-Hammond (2021), who argues that while pedagogical skills are broadly applicable, the depth and precision of curriculum planning are frequently challenged when teachers must interpret standards for subjects outside their primary expertise. An identified limitation in this domain is that high competency ratings may reflect a teacher's ability to follow a lesson plan format rather than their depth in "unpacking" complex subject-specific competencies. To mitigate this, future researchers might analyze actual Lesson Plans (DLP/DLL) to see if the high perceived competence matches the quality of the instructional design.

In the domain of Assessment and Reporting, non-specialized teachers demonstrated a high level of pedagogical competency, as evidenced by a median score of 4.00. When evaluating the research question regarding differences based on teacher profiles, the statistical analysis yielded significant differences (p

< 0.05) when respondents were grouped by Sex and Subject Currently Handled. This implies that while the overall competence is high, the specific strategies for evaluating student progress and the burden of reporting results vary depending on the teacher's gender and the particular out-of-field subject assigned. For other variables such as age, educational attainment, and years of experience, no significant differences were found, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis for those specific categories. This finding is reinforced by Caneda and Biol Jr. (2025), who emphasize that assessment competence is a critical intervention point for out-of-field teaching, as teachers must adapt their grading criteria to subjects that they did not formally study.

The significance of Sex in this domain suggests that male and female teachers may employ different monitoring and feedback mechanisms, a nuance that aligns with localized studies suggesting gender-based differences in administrative and reporting meticulousness. An identified limitation in these results is that high self-ratings in assessment may reflect the successful completion of "grading tasks" (compliance) rather than the actual quality of the feedback provided to students. To address this source of error, future research should include a document analysis of graded student outputs and feedback logs to determine if the high perceived competency translates into effective formative and summative assessment practices.

In the domain of Personal and Professional Development, non-specialized teachers recorded a high competency level with a median score of 4.00. Addressing the research question on significant differences based on profile, the statistical analysis reveals no significant differences ($p > 0.05$) when teachers are grouped by age, educational attainment, field of specialization, or years of teaching experience. However, a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) was identified based on the Subject Currently Handled. This indicates that while teachers possess a general intrinsic drive for professional growth, the specific subject they are assigned—such as MAPEH, Araling Panlipunan, or EsP—dictates the specific type and frequency of professional development activities they must pursue to bridge their specialized

knowledge gaps.

This high engagement in growth activities is anchored on Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that a teacher's self-efficacy—the belief in one's capability to organize and execute courses of action—drives them to be resilient and adaptive through continuous learning. Recent studies by Camral and Sumayo (2025) and Caballero and Caballero (2025) support this, highlighting that active professional development is the primary mechanism for maintaining pedagogical competence among out-of-field teachers. An identified limitation in this domain is the potential for "professional compliance," where teachers might attend seminars for credit rather than actual skill acquisition. This source of error is mitigated by the respondents' high scores in applying new knowledge, though future research could benefit from longitudinal data tracking the long-term impact of these training programs on actual classroom performance.

Regarding the Challenges Encountered, non-specialized teachers reported a moderate level of difficulty, evidenced by an overall median score of 3.00 (Challenging). Unlike the competency domains where results were largely uniform, the statistical analysis for this section reveals significant differences ($p < 0.05$) when teachers are grouped by Sex, Field of Specialization, and Years of Teaching Experience. This indicates that the hurdles of subject misalignment—such as limited content knowledge, heavy workloads, and the pressure of teaching unfamiliar topics—are not experienced equally across the teaching force. Specifically, the data suggest that male and female teachers, as well as those with different academic backgrounds and levels of tenure, perceive the weight of these challenges differently, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis for these specific categories.

This finding is a direct echo of the research by Ingersoll (2012) and Oracion (2018), who argue that teaching outside one's specialization often leads to reduced confidence and instructional depth. Furthermore, Aljibe (2019) notes that these challenges are typically rooted in structural school management issues rather than individual teacher failures. An inconsistency arises when comparing

these results to the high competency scores in Tables 1–5; while teachers believe they are performing at a high level, they simultaneously acknowledge that doing so is a significant struggle. This suggests a potential source of error or limitation where teachers may be "compensating" through extreme effort, leading to a risk of burnout—a factor not fully captured by competency scales alone. To address this, future research may investigate the correlation between these challenges and the long-term mental well-being of out-of-field educators.

In the Schools Division Office of Santiago City, the assignment of teachers outside their specialization remains a common practice in Junior High School. This situation raises concerns regarding the pedagogical competence of non-specialized teachers in out-of-field teaching assignments. Thus, this study determined the level of pedagogical competence of non-specialized Junior High School teachers and tested for significant differences when grouped according to selected profile variables. Findings revealed that pedagogical competence was generally comparable across most profile variables, indicating relative uniformity in foundational teaching skills. However, the subject currently handled significantly influenced competence in selected domains. In addition, the learning environment domain was significantly associated with sex, age, and years of teaching experience, while the level of challenges varied according to sex, field of specialization, and teaching experience. Overall, non-specialized Junior High School teachers demonstrated generally adequate pedagogical competence; however, variations related to subject assignment and selected teacher characteristics indicate the need for targeted professional support in out-of-field teaching contexts.

In light of the findings, it is recommended that the Schools Division Office of Santiago City develop and implement subject-specific professional development programs on Pedagogical Content Knowledge for non-specialized Junior High School teachers, particularly those handling MAPEH, Araling Panlipunan, and Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (ESP), within the next school year.

School heads are likewise encouraged to institutionalize quarterly mentoring and instructional coaching, especially for teachers with fewer years of teaching experience, to strengthen competencies in the learning environment domain. Non-specialized teachers are further encouraged to participate in at least one relevant professional development activity per semester to continuously enhance their pedagogical competence and address challenges in out-of-field teaching. Moreover, the Schools Division Office and school administrators may review teacher–subject alignment during annual staffing beginning next academic year to minimize prolonged out-of-field assignments. Finally, future researchers may conduct follow-up studies within the next two to three years using wider samples or mixed methods to further validate and extend the present findings.

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