

Exploring Elementary Teachers' Perspective in Teaching Subjects Outside their Area of Specialization (AOS): Challenges and Strategies

Ferre Luz M. Tagose^{1*}, Shangela P. Sañada¹, Jan Stephen B. Magallanes¹, Rodeth Jane C. Quezada¹

¹Department of Teacher Education, Guild of Elementary Educators, UM Digos College, Digos City, Philippines

Abstract—This study explored the lived experiences of elementary Master Teachers holding a Bachelor in Elementary Education (BEEd) degree as they taught subjects outside their area of specialization (AOS). Using a qualitative narrative research design with a biographical-narrative approach, the study focused on three Master Teachers from public elementary schools in Malungon, Sarangani, each specializing in different fields. Participants were selected through snowball sampling to capture diverse perspectives. Data were collected through one-month classroom observations and in-depth interviews, then analyzed using restorying. The results revealed that despite their lack of formal training in Music, the Master Teachers showed strong perseverance, adaptability, and a commitment to student learning. They effectively used multimedia tools, recycled materials, and culturally relevant songs to make lessons engaging and accessible. Grounded in Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, the study emphasizes that effective teaching goes beyond content mastery and highlights the need for systemic support, proper subject-teacher alignment, and continuous professional development to ensure quality education.

Index Terms—Biographical-narrative, out-of-field teaching, self-efficacy theory.

1. Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of basic education, elementary teachers are expected to serve as the cornerstone of learners' academic, emotional, and social development. It is their responsibility to establish the foundational knowledge and skills in young learners, making it essential that they possess high levels of skills and expertise in their field. Nevertheless, many educators frequently teach subjects that do not align with their area of expertise, which can pose considerable challenges. Teaching a subject with limited knowledge is known as "out-of-field teaching" which can be among the most challenging issues for many teachers (Outreach, 2022). Co et al. (2021) explain that this is a significant issue because even skilled teachers can become unqualified if given subjects they are not trained in. So, when teachers are not adequately prepared, it can adversely affect their students' learning and educational experience. This situation occurs due to a shortage of teachers with the necessary training and expertise to fulfill the demand (Abrantes & Bargamento, 2024).

Barbadillo & Al (2021) state that education should prioritize employing qualified teachers. Some teachers are regarded as unqualified because their teaching subjects do not match their training. However, teaching subjects outside their expertise can present difficulties, as it necessitates them to gather new information, which demands both time and effort alongside their teaching responsibilities and a deep comprehension of the learning process. The teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy, professional identities, beliefs, and sense of community all come into play, ultimately influencing their knowledge of what and how to teach (Hobbs & Porsch, 2021). Out-of-field teaching reduced "excitement about teaching" and sparked worries about the inability to provide pupils with high-quality instruction (Outreach, 2022). They struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary and the new teaching methods they had to implement. As a result, they struggled to explain lessons in greater detail (Melloria et al., 2023). DepEd Order No. 010, s. 2024 underscores that the MATATAG Curriculum envisions teachers as innovative 21st-century educators who prepare Filipino learners with future-ready skills. It recognizes teachers as the most valuable asset in the teaching and learning process, requiring them to demonstrate competence in their subject areas and/or fields of specialization across the curriculum. However, a mismatch between the subjects assigned and a teacher's qualifications may result in challenges to student engagement, quality instruction, and overall educational outcomes (Department of Education, 2024).

Many schools worldwide are also facing the problem of teachers having to teach subjects they are not specialized in. For instance, a study carried out at a primary school in Chongqing, China, found that a shortage of teachers in certain schools has forced teachers to teach subjects beyond their field of expertise, making it more challenging for them to advance in their professional development (Ma, 2024). A survey conducted in Western Australia revealed that 28% of educators were teaching subjects not aligned with their area of expertise during the 2007-2008 school year (Arendain & Limpot, 2022). Furthermore, according to the most recent Australian Council for Educational Research study, 40% of Year 7 and Year 10 children were taught math by teachers who were not adequately

*Corresponding author: ferreluztagose12@gmail.com

qualified (Bugwak, 2021). A comprehensive survey conducted across Germany revealed that in Year 9, 36% of mathematics educators, 31% of biology instructors, 25% of chemistry faculty, and 34% of physics educators lack the qualifications to teach their respective subjects. In Ireland, teachers also face issues of under-qualification in their subjects, attributed to factors such as teacher quotas, availability of subjects, geographical location, and contract-related issues (Price et al., 2019).

Out-of-field teaching represents a considerable yet overlooked issue in schools across the Philippines and within the Department of Education. This oversight may stem from the department's long-standing reliance on the same approach, which has not evolved to tackle the problem of educators being assigned to teach subjects that fall outside their areas of expertise in schools nationwide (Jr & Roble, 2022). The analysis presented in EDCOM 2 reviewed information from the Department of Education (DepEd) concerning a group of 700,000 public school teachers and found that 62%, or about six out of ten public school educators, are teaching subjects for which they did not receive specialized training in college (Magsambol, 2024). According to the 2018 PISA results of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Philippines ranked second-to-last in Science and Mathematics. They placed lowest in Reading Comprehension among 79 participating countries. In response, the Department of Education (DepEd) acknowledged that a significant barrier to delivering quality education lies in the limited number of teacher-education graduates with sufficient expertise or credentials in these subject areas (Bugwak, 2021). Furthermore, findings from the House Basic Education Panel on August 29, 2024, revealed that more than half of science teachers lack adequate training, heightening concerns over students' readiness for the science-focused PISA assessment in 2025 (Chi, 2024).

We chose Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory to elucidate how people's belief in their abilities affects decision-making, effort, and perseverance (Withy, 2019). The concept is pertinent to educators because a teacher's self-identity affects the mindset and behaviors in the classroom. Per Lazarides and Warner (2020), teachers with high self-efficacy are more willing to try new tactics, set higher goals, and maintain organization in difficult circumstances. Additionally, teachers who are positively inclined toward their professional activities perceive threats as opportunities, treat mistakes as experience, and are open to something new (Hagen & Park, 2023). We found that the participants' experiences reflected this interplay because their self-efficacy beliefs affected how they approached and solved the problems related to teaching subjects outside their areas of expertise.

In this study, we explored the lived experiences of Master Teachers in some selected schools in Malungon, Sarangani, who were assigned to teach subjects not aligned with their fields of specialization. What interested us was the difficulties they experienced and how they reacted and coped. By documenting their stories, we also wanted to give voice to these teachers and the lived experiences they shared with us. Our goal was to help

develop programs and resources to better serve students by providing teachers with impactful tools to refine learning and promote a conducive environment.

A. *Research Objectives*

1. To explore the specific challenges encountered by Master Teachers holding a Bachelor of Elementary Education degree in preparing lessons for subjects beyond their field of specialization;
2. To analyze how Master Teachers with a Bachelor of Elementary Education degree adapt and modify instructional materials for teaching subjects outside their expertise;
3. To assess the strategies employed by Master Teachers with a Bachelor of Elementary Education degree to teach subjects beyond their specialization effectively.

2. Method

A. *Participants*

The primary focus of this study is the Master Teachers from public elementary schools in Malungon, Sarangani. These teachers held a Bachelor's in Elementary Education (BEEd) degree specializing in Science, Math, and Filipino, but were teaching subjects outside their expertise. We selected the participants because they had already completed their BEEd degree under the previous Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC), which provided a range of specializations that fit with their current teaching assignments. We specifically sampled participants using the snowball sampling. In this study, we interviewed three participants. According to Subedi (2021), a sample size of one to three participants is common in narrative research because the focus is on detailed, rich narrative data rather than generalizability. Creswell (2013) also supports this view, noting that narrative studies often engage a few participants to gain a deep understanding of personal experiences. Moreover, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study; however, withdrawal the day before the final defense was not accepted.

To select the participants, we established the following criteria: (1) they must have graduated with a Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) degree, specializing in a specific major; (2) they must be currently teaching in public schools; (3) they must be currently teaching or have taught Music in the

elementary grades; (4) they must have at least ten years of teaching experience; and (5) they must be willing to participate in interviews discussing their experiences, challenges, and methods for teaching subjects outside their area of specialization.

Per the narrative approach of this study, participants are presented through detailed biographical narratives to respect the richness and uniqueness of their lived experiences. This aligns with the focus of narrative inquiry on context, and personal meaning in the experience (Creswell, 2013). In order to protect confidentiality, pseudonyms are adopted throughout the research.

1) *Teacher Ren*

Teacher Ren, a 49-year-old teacher from Purok 4, Malalag Cogon, Malungon, Sarangani, has devoted most of her life to education. She was born on February 21, 1976, in Malalag, Davao del Sur, and from an early age, she showed a deep love for learning. She graduated with honors in elementary and high school, earning the title of Valedictorian—a clear sign of her

determination and hard work. She pursued her dream of becoming a teacher at Mindanao State University, where she earned her degree in Elementary Education, majoring in science. Her journey didn't stop there. Wanting to grow even more in her profession, she later completed her master's degree in Educational Management at Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges in General Santos City. Throughout her teaching career, which spans over 26 years, Teacher Ren has taught different subjects—even those beyond her major. One of these is Music, which she handled at the elementary level. Though not her area of expertise, she did her best to make the lessons meaningful and engaging for her pupils. She took time to study the content, find creative ways to explain unfamiliar terms, and adjust her teaching style to fit the needs of her learners.

In 2021, her efforts were recognized when she was named Most Outstanding Teacher in her school and was awarded as Huwarang Bidang Guro ng Malungon (First Place at the municipal level and Third Place at the division level). However, for Teacher Ren, the biggest reward has always been the smiles and progress of her students. Her strength lies not just in her credentials, but in her heart for teaching. She is known for her kind but firm classroom presence, her skill in making lessons understandable, and her ability to connect with children from all backgrounds. Her story reflects what it means to be a dedicated public-school teacher—always learning, adjusting, and giving her best, no matter the subject.

2) *Teacher Ana*

Teacher Ana, now 49 years old, born on April 11, 1976, grew up in Bolton, Malalag, Davao del Sur, in a simple home where she learned the importance of respect, hard work, and serving others. She now lives in Purok 4, Malalag Cogon, Malungon, Sarangani, where she continues to live out those values through her work as a public-school teacher. Her journey in education started early, studying at Malalag Cogon Elementary School and Malalag Cogon National High School. Knowing from a young age that she wanted to teach, she pursued a degree in Elementary Education, majoring in Filipino, at Cor Jesu College. She was accepted as an entrance scholar and made the most of every opportunity. Later, her passion for learning led her to finish her master's in Educational Management at Quezon Colleges of Southern Philippines.

With over 28 years of teaching experience, Teacher Ana has handled many subjects, including those outside her major. While her heart belongs to Filipinos, she also took on the challenge of teaching Music at the elementary level. This experience made her more creative, flexible, and open to learning new things. While stepping into unfamiliar territory wasn't easy, she approached it with the same focus and care she brings to all her lessons by studying the material thoroughly, simplifying complex ideas for her pupils, and adapting her style

to suit different learning needs. Over the years, her dedication and excellence in teaching have earned her various awards. In 2019, she was recognized not only at the school and municipal levels but also at the division and regional levels for her outstanding performance. Her educational research and classroom innovation efforts also gained attention in regional research congresses. What sets Teacher Ana apart is her steady presence. She isn't one to seek the spotlight, but her patience, dedication, and willingness to keep learning have impacted her students and colleagues. For her, success doesn't come from big gestures—it comes from showing up every day, doing her best, and letting her work speak for itself.

3) *Teacher Liza*

Teacher Liza, now 46 years old, was born on July 30, 1978, in Malungon, Sarangani. She grew up in a household where integrity and perseverance were not just taught—they were lived every day. Today, she lives in Kitakal, Malalag Cogon, Malungon, Sarangani, where she continues to live out those same values in her work as a public-school teacher. Her journey in education started right in her community. She studied at Malalag Cogon Elementary School and later at Malalag Cogon National High School. Naturally gifted in Math and known for her logical thinking, she pursued a degree in Elementary Education, majoring in Mathematics, at Mindanao State University in General Santos City. In the following years, her desire to grow in her profession led her to complete a master's in Educational Management at Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges.

With over 16 years of experience in the classroom, Teacher Liza has taught Math and taken on the challenge of teaching subjects outside her specialization, including Music. Although music is not her area of expertise, she tried to study the basic concepts and prepare simple activities to help her students understand the lessons. Her willingness to learn and adapt shows her dedication to her role as a teacher. From 2021 to 2024, she was named Most Outstanding Teacher at the school level for four consecutive years—proof of her quiet but consistent excellence. Those around her admire her for her mastery of content and the clear, organized, and nurturing classroom environment she creates. What makes Teacher Liza stand out is her deep connection with her students. She's known for weaving culturally relevant examples into her lessons and creating a classroom where students feel seen and valued. Her teaching goes beyond textbook material, bringing in stories, warmth, and genuine enthusiasm for helping students learn.

B. *Instruments*

We spent one month observing their classrooms and daily routines before sitting for individual one-on-one interviews to understand what participants experienced. Qualitative research has shown that interviews and participant observation complement each other for generating authentic insights, which is true in our case. The extended fieldwork allowed participants to open up naturally while we observed their stories unfold in real time. This approach deepened our understanding and enabled us to verify what the participant told us, creating a clearer and more reliable picture of their situation (Dado et al.,

2023).

We developed an interview script that outlined the main questions and topics we planned to address. This approach helped maintain focus during conversations while allowing participants the freedom to express themselves naturally. Utibe (2020) explains how interview guides serve qualitative research effectively, providing necessary structure without restricting authentic participant responses. During interviews, we combined handwritten notes with audio recordings. This dual approach offered immediate observational insights alongside complete recordings for later analysis. We wanted to capture every significant detail that might otherwise slip by unnoticed. Rutakumwa et al. (2020) note that audio recording has become standard practice for creating dependable transcripts from qualitative interviews. Once participants agreed to the recording, the devices practically disappeared from the conversation. People forgot they were there, which let our discussions unfold more naturally and genuinely (Thissen et al., 2008).

To analyze the data, we used restorying, following Ollerenshaw and Creswell's (2002) narrative approach. After conducting in-depth interviews, we collected the teachers' accounts and reorganized them into chronological stories that captured their experiences teaching outside their areas of expertise. This process helped us identify significant events, challenges, and turning points in each story while maintaining each teacher's distinct voice. Working through these organized narratives revealed patterns that showed us the common strategies teachers used and how they managed unfamiliar teaching responsibilities.

C. Design and Procedure

We utilized a biographical-narrative approach under a qualitative research design. One method for researching how people tell stories about their lives were the narrative approach (McLeod, 2024). Since narrative research explores the participant's whole story to reveal their own experiences, we believed it would yield the most informative conclusions about the data (Kaluza, 2023).

Before starting the study, we obtained approval for the research questionnaire and interview guidelines with assistance from the Research Publication Center of UM Digos College. We ensured that all necessary documents were in place before beginning the study. This included securing signatures from the RPC, Dean, Program Head, Research Adviser, Division of Sarangani, and the principals of the selected schools in Malungon.

During the study, the school principal signed a letter and notified the school about the research. We then spent one month

observing one potential participant, paying close attention to their classroom preparation, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they used. On the first day of observation, we asked the initial participant to suggest someone with a similar experience. We then spent another month observing the second and third participants within the same time frame, just as we did with the first, before conducting follow-up interviews. Afterward, we contacted each participant to check their availability for an interview. The in-person interviews that followed allowed for more in-depth interaction and provided insightful information about their viewpoints.

Here's the following weekly timeline for guided data collection through observation and informal interaction.

After each interview, we forwarded the translated recordings to a data analyst using the restorying as our data analysis. Two weeks later, the evaluated data were returned to us. We preserved data integrity throughout the research process by securely storing all research materials, including the recorded interviews, to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality.

D. Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent. Before collecting data, we clarified to participants what the research's purpose was, what participation would entail, and how their input would be utilized. We stated that they could participate in the study without any repercussions and at any point in time. After providing these explanations, written authorization was obtained formally. The process demonstrated the usual ethical standards of qualitative research, prioritizing individuals' independence and decision-making (Arifin, 2018).

Trust, Transparency, and Accountability. We focused on building authentic and trustworthy working relationships with participants throughout the research. We made certain that participants were fully informed and communicated expectations and boundaries. People's willingness to share their personal or professional experiences was crucial in fostering a sense of trust and confidence. Consent was documented, communication was transparent, and feedback and concerns were addressed with respect at every stage (UK Statistics Authority, 2020).

Confidentiality and Data Privacy. We took great care in dealing with respondents' personal information and responses. Our research team was the only one authorized to access any potentially sensitive data encrypted in digital storage. We refrained from using identifying information during the presentation and discussion of results. Moreover, the study complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), which protects individuals' rights over personal data in

Table 1
Weekly timeline for data collection

Week	Focus	Description	Activities
Week 1	Initial Classroom Observation	Entered the school environment and began informal observations to understand the context and build rapport for authentic storytelling.	Classroom immersion, field notes, casual conversations
Week 2	Observation on Teaching Challenges	Observations focused on how teachers handled subjects outside their specialization and documented real-time challenges.	Detailed observations, short reflective chats, and researcher journaling
Week 3	Instructional Materials Adaptation Observation	Focused on how teachers adapted methods and materials to teach unfamiliar content effectively.	Documentation of visual aids, restructured lessons, and teacher strategies
Week 4	Observation of Teaching Strategies	Observed how teachers engaged students using creative strategies despite instructional limitations.	Field notes on games, group work, rewards, and student responses

the Philippines. International ethical standards concerning data protection were observed throughout the research process (National Privacy Commission, 2022).

Equity and Inclusion. Our study considered diverse teacher experiences to capture different viewpoints in our selection process. No matter what age, nature, or educational background we may have encountered, we treated all individuals equally. The research environment was made to be as inclusive and supportive as possible while considering social and cultural factors. Considering the viewpoints of others not only improved our ethical research practice but also enhanced the breadth and trustworthiness of our discoveries (Hennink et al., 2020).

3. Results

A. From Experiments to Expressions: A Science Major's Exploration in Music Teaching

For Teacher Ren (all names are pseudonyms), a science major, stepping into the world of Music instruction was like entering unfamiliar territory. Music was not just outside her specialization; it was a subject she found difficult to grasp, both technically and personally. With no strong background in musical notes and a confessed struggle with tone, she faced each Music class with hesitation. Yet, as an elementary teacher, she knew avoiding the subject was not an option. A journey of adaptation unfolded, where she leaned on digital tools and classroom creativity to bridge the gap. The following narrative reveals how she coped with these challenges and transformed her limitations into opportunities for fun, interactive learning:

"Since my area of concentration is Science, it was very difficult for me when I had to teach the Music subject. That was really one of the things I struggled with because I found music hard to understand. I'm even tone-deaf and not interested in musical notes at all. However, if it's in written form—like making a lesson plan about it—it's easier for me. I think it's the delivery of the lesson that I find challenging, especially when it involves singing. Of course, I can't avoid teaching the subject since I'm an elementary teacher. For materials, I usually use YouTube videos, visual aids, and printed lyrics. This help make the lesson engaging for the students because they are interactive and easy to understand. The strategies I use include letting the students play rhythm games or do group singing, which makes the class fun and promotes teamwork. They learn while enjoying. There was even a time in our class when I held a "Music Idol" activity where I let them sing by group and gave feedback afterward. They were very excited and everyone participated." (Fieldnotes, April 2025)

Although Music was not part of her specialization, Teacher Ren accepted the challenge of teaching it with openness and creativity. She acknowledged her limitations, being tone deaf and lacking formal knowledge of musical concepts, yet these did not prevent her from trying. Teacher Ren built on what she did well rather than dwelling on her limitations. Her careful lesson planning, resourcefulness, and knack for keeping students engaged became her foundation. She used YouTube videos, printed song lyrics, and simple visual aids to create a

classroom where learning felt fun and accessible, though she still battled private moments of self-doubt. Her approach transformed what it meant to teach music. Instead of centering lessons around technical precision, she prioritized sparking enthusiasm and getting everyone involved. Rhythm games and group singing helped students grasp musical concepts while building stronger bonds with each other. Her "Music Idol" project became her boldest move, turning her constraints into opportunities for students to display their talent and creativity. This experience taught Teacher Ren something important: teaching music wasn't about perfect pitch or flawless technique. It was about creating genuine connections and helping students discover the joy and confidence that emerges when they learn together.

B. From Language to Lyrics: A Filipino Major's Journey through Music Teaching

Teacher Ana's story mirrors Teacher Ren's experience in many ways. As a Filipino major, she never expected to be standing in front of a music classroom. The subject had always made her uncomfortable, dating back to college. She lacked formal training, which left her struggling with confidence and understanding the material she was supposed to teach. This unexpected assignment forced Teacher Ana to confront the holes in her knowledge. She felt the weight of stepping into a role she'd never imagined for herself. But here's what made the difference: Teacher Ana refused to let her students suffer because of her limitations. She was determined they'd still get something valuable from her class. Teacher Ana's experience shows what happens when teachers get thrown into unfamiliar territory. It's messy, uncomfortable, and requires flexibility beyond what most people expect from the job. Her dedication to her students became stronger than her personal doubts. She found ways to adapt, even when everything felt uncertain.

"In the Music subject, the topic was 'Finding the Higher and Lower DO of the Key Major'. It was very difficult for me because I didn't have enough knowledge to teach music. I feel it's really difficult because this subject is my most hated subject since college. That's why every time I need to teach music; I ask for help from my husband because he is a Music major. The materials I have found most helpful are audio clips, video tutorials, and simple instruments like tambourines or homemade drums. It's easier for them to understand the beat and rhythm if they can hear and see something. As for the strategies, sing-along activities and clap and tap games are very effective. They can feel the rhythm in their bodies, and connecting it to the lesson is easier. One time, I made the class sing 'Leron Leron Sinta', then we analyzed the melody and tempo. After that, we performed as a simple group using recycled instruments. The children were very happy." (Fieldnotes, April 2025)

Teacher Ana's story captures the quiet courage that educators often need when they're assigned subjects outside their comfort zone. She had never been good at music—in fact, she had once feared it—but she didn't let that stop her from fulfilling her

duties. As Teacher Ana entered this new area, she used all the resources she could find, including her husband's expertise, rather than letting her ignorance hold her back. She persevered and used her imagination to find ways to relate her personal struggles to the needs of her students. She began utilizing audio recordings, improvised instruments, and other visual and aural aids. These weren't merely fallback options but conscious decisions that helped her students comprehend abstract musical concepts. In addition to keeping her students engaged, rhythmic games and sing-alongs encouraged them to sense rhythm in their bodies naturally. She also came up with easy yet interesting activities. Students became enthusiastic about learning due to their analyzing folk songs and performances using recycled materials. Their excitement encouraged her to keep experimenting. Teacher Ana learned from these experiences that effective teaching is about making lessons engaging for students, not being an expert in everything. Despite all the difficulties, Teacher Ana truly enjoyed seeing her students develop. Along the way, she also learned that she was developing as a teacher.

C. From Numbers to Notes: A Math Major's Creative Shift in Teaching Music

Teacher Liza had a background in mathematics, so she was taken by surprise when she was given the responsibility of teaching music. This subject required a different rhythm that she had never been taught to follow. In contrast to the numbers and equations she was so familiar with, concepts like tempo, notes, and melody felt alien to her. She was unsure what to prioritize or how to present the material because lesson preparation frequently felt like attempting to solve an equation with missing variables. She wasn't going to let these doubts stop her. She took on the task with tenacity, inventiveness, and a strong dedication to her students. This became the tale of a math teacher who, empowered by her perseverance, creativity, and empathy, ventured into the uncharted territory of music.

"Honestly, I really have a hard time preparing a Music lesson plan because I'm not familiar with technical terms like rhythm, tempo, and notes. Sometimes, I'm not sure if the sequence of the lesson is correct or if I can deliver it properly. I need to do more research so I can understand the content before I teach. One time, I made a lesson about reading musical notes. It was very challenging because I don't know how to read a musical staff, and I don't have enough background on how to teach it. What made it harder was making it simple enough for the pupils to understand, especially since most of them were hearing about it for the first time. For me, video tutorials, sample lesson plans, and interactive songs for elementary really help. Also, printable

worksheets with visuals are easier for them to understand than long explanations. As for my strategies, I usually use simple songs and body movements so they enjoy learning Music. I let them sing songs they are familiar with, then slowly introduce new concepts like rhythm or melody. I try to connect it to real life like songs they hear on TikTok or TV so it becomes

more relatable. There was one time I had them make instruments using recycled materials, and we used those for a group rhythm activity and they really enjoyed it." (Fieldnotes, April 2025)

Teacher Liza's story captures something most educators know but rarely talk about - that sinking feeling when you're asked to teach something you barely understand. She didn't try to hide her confusion about basic music concepts like rhythm, tempo, and notes. Anyone thrusts into uncharted teaching territory will relate to her candor about feeling lost when creating lessons or

determining how to deliver them. What set her apart, though, was that she persisted. She taught herself so she could go back and teach her students, so instead of freaking out, she threw herself into research and searched online resources. She didn't try to become an overnight music expert, which was the true beauty of her approach. She determined what her children could understand and what would truly matter to them. Her lifeline was video tutorials. Simple children's songs and visual worksheets aided her students' learning and gave her much-needed confidence. She kept things lighthearted and caring by combining simple songs with movement exercises that engaged everyone without the anxiety that typically accompanies technical subjects. It clicked when she began utilizing music that her students were already familiar with. TV themes and TikTok songs suddenly made the classroom material relevant to their everyday lives. The magic happened during a project where children created instruments from recycled materials. What began as a simple task evolved into this incredible group rhythm exercise, with everyone giggling and engrossed. For Teacher Liza, teaching music was no longer about fulfilling curriculum requirements. Her focus shifted to making memories that her students would genuinely cherish. She demonstrated that you can give any subject meaning, even when studying it with your children, if you put in the necessary time and effort.

D. Learning as Narrative Inquirers

We were reminded by listening to these three Master Teachers that teaching outside of one's area of expertise goes beyond one's professional obligation. It turns into a profoundly human encounter. Despite having diverse backgrounds in science, mathematics, and Filipino, all of the teachers demonstrated a similar willingness to explore new areas for the benefit of their students. Something significant emerged from their experiences: learning new material isn't the only goal. It involves negotiating uncertainty with transparency, modesty, and a well-defined goal. Subject-matter expertise is important, but how teachers address their students' needs makes learning meaningful. We discovered that the essence of teaching lies in expertise, the willingness to adapt, and the dedication to care.

The anecdotes we collected demonstrated how teachers can transcend the limits of their subject-matter expertise with the support of planning, imagination, and humility. All three educators stressed the importance of preparing for honesty, relevance, and accessibility rather than perfection. They

adopted technology, created locally relevant materials, and asked for help when they needed it. These methods demonstrated that teaching is about helping students make their own discoveries, not about being an expert in everything. Their experiences underscore a crucial point: building relationships with students is more crucial for classroom success than having formal credentials. Regardless of the subject, what counts is giving lessons purpose and making knowledge come to life. These educators demonstrated that resourcefulness and genuineness are frequently more important than knowledge.

The way these stories reminded us of something basic—that teaching takes place in the space between teacher and student—was what most impressed us. These teachers demonstrated incredible bravery by diving into subjects they knew little about, working tirelessly to understand difficult ideas, and sitting there learning alongside their students. Sincere concern and a desire to keep improving are the foundations of that professionalism. Something became evident when we sat with their stories and put them back together. These educators brought much more than just technical expertise to their classrooms. They had a care ethic and a resolute determination to never stop learning, no matter what. They told more than just struggles. They were evidence of change. They demonstrated to us that great teaching is more about your heart and curiosity than it is about knowing all the answers.

4. Discussions

The Master Teachers in this study approached the challenge with tenacity, flexibility, and a strong sense of responsibility, even though music was outside their expertise. Teachers Ren, Ana, and Liza acknowledged having periods of hesitancy and uncertainty, particularly when confronted with concepts and technical terms they had never studied in school. However, rather than letting these limitations deter them, they faced the task head-on, fueled not by confidence in the subject but by their deep commitment to their students' learning. Their meeting reflects a common trend in Philippine elementary schools, where instructors are often given subjects beyond their areas of specialization. Additionally, as pointed out by DepEd (2020), the mismatch can result in instructional gaps, especially in Music, a performance-based subject that necessitates specific expertise. Lack of content understanding hurts teacher confidence and quality of teaching (Penuliar & Natividad, 2025). This may negatively impact student learning. Within the scope of these educators, we are reminded of the significance of targeted professional growth and capacity-building initiatives, alongside broader educational issues (Co et al, 2021) and the OECD (2020), which emphasize equipping teachers to excel and adjust to emerging teaching areas. Instead of allowing their constraints to define them, they depended on self-motivation, ingenuity, and a firm conviction that they could still positively impact their students' education. This illustrates Bandura's (1997) idea of self-efficacy, emphasizing that a person's belief in their capability to succeed affects their approach to tasks and their ability to tackle challenges.

Additionally, these educators carefully adjusted their instructional resources to aid their students' learning. They

utilized videos, visual tools, repurposed instruments, and relatable songs for the students. These were not merely quick fixes but intentional modifications that enhanced the content's accessibility and enjoyment. Educause (2020) noted that utilizing various multimedia resources like videos and visuals greatly improves student involvement and understanding, particularly for those with different learning requirements. Similarly, Riyanto et al. (2021) highlighted the efficacy of utilizing recycled and locally obtained materials to create teaching resources that are economical and relevant to the context. Moreover, altering songs and audio materials has effectively enhanced language acquisition and increased student engagement, especially when the content is recognizable and culturally relevant (U.S. Department of State, 2022).

Lastly, their strategies exceeded delivering lessons by creating joyful, interactive learning spaces. From group singing to rhythm games, their methods brought energy into the classroom and encouraged student participation. These activities helped students engage and helped the teachers feel more confident and connected. Research has demonstrated that structured music and movement programs significantly boost early childhood teachers' confidence when implementing rhythm- and music-based activities (Savage et al., 2024). Classroom rhythm and movement sessions have been shown to enhance teacher self-efficacy and improve the use of music throughout the school day (Williams, 2023). Additionally, integrating music and movement in basic education supports student engagement and fosters positive social interaction and emotional development (del Barrio & Arús, 2024). These Master Teachers saw every lesson as a chance for personal development rather than just a chore to complete. Even subjects outside one's expertise can be approached with passion, originality, and a sense of accomplishment that goes well beyond content mastery if one is committed and open-minded, as their experiences demonstrated.

5. Conclusion

We had the opportunity to observe firsthand the actual challenges faced by elementary master teachers in Malungon, Sarangani, as they took on subjects outside of their areas of expertise during this study. As they attempted to make sense of lessons beyond their areas of expertise, their stories showed moments of frustration, uncertainty, and even emotional strain. However, alongside these challenges, what stood out most was their unwavering commitment—the creativity they brought into their classrooms and the extra effort they poured into ensuring their students continued to learn meaningfully. They altered materials, utilized active techniques, and relied on student-centered approaches to facilitate significant learning even when the content exceeded their comfort levels. Their stories reveal the depth of their commitment to their sense of duty and the high level of care they provide for their students. We believe these stories should not be ignored. They point to teachers' urgent need for greater support and compassion.

This is similar to our study, where we concluded that it is not easy to be an elementary teacher handling different subjects.

There should be proper alignment when assigning them to subjects. The government can aid in this by reducing the load on both the students and the teachers. We observed how challenging it is to provide quality teaching without adequate preparation, particularly when the assigned topic falls outside one's training field. While teachers made every effort to adapt and innovate, expecting them to sort out these problems is unreasonable. With proper alignment, training, and resources, teachers will be more confident and students will have the quality education they deserve. This problem is an institutional and policy-level shift, not just individual effort.

Sharing these experiences can help craft more supportive and responsive educational practices. We hope this study discusses the significance of specialization, ongoing support, and professional growth between school leaders, policymakers, and teacher training institutions. By listening carefully to the voices of teachers, we can construct systems that honor their experience while equipping them with the tools they need to develop. As researchers and future educators, we recognize the resilience of these Master Teachers—but we also acknowledge that resilience should not be the only solution. Lasting change requires collaborative effort, and we hope this study becomes a step toward that goal.

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