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Research Article

Teaching Araling Panlipunan: A Study of Challenges and Coping Mechanisms among Non-Social Studies Major Educators

Rowena May T. David*

College of Education, Instructor I, Bulacan State University, City of Malolos Bulacaan, 3003, Philippines

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*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

rowenamay.david@bulsu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

This research focused on the challenges and coping mechanisms of Non-Social Studies major teachers assigned to teach Araling Panlipunan in Bulacan, Philippines. This, therefore, makes the pressing call for comprehensive content knowledge, effective assessment strategies, collaborative approaches to teaching, and continuous professional development in order to fill the gap in expertise in teaching Philippine history, culture, and society. Key findings revealed that teachers belonging to the Non-Social Studies major often experience problems in their teaching brought about by insufficient subject-specific knowledge, which consequently affects their confidence and accuracy in content delivery. In this regard, it is proposed in the study a program on "Capacitating the Competence of the Non-Social Studies Major Teachers." This program seeks to enhance teaching competencies with focused interventions that equip teachers with necessary competencies and knowledge. These recommendations include a vertical professional learning community, teaching aids bank, and focused seminars and training programs. The study reinforces continuous learning and institutional support as ways to educational excellence and calls for future research into the impact of advanced degrees on teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: *Non-Social Studies major teachers, Challenges, Coping mechanisms, Proposed programs*

Introduction

Success for any Philippine education system, much like other stalwart institutions of society, depends on the quality of its teachers. Qualified teachers ensure that students are groomed into successful persons with

necessary sets of skills and competent knowledge. There is no denying that the importance of having passionate yet qualified educators is great because it directly correlates to the very foundation of positive student outcomes. According to UNESCO (2018) a qualified

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teacher is somebody who has attained at least the minimum requirements academically and professionally for teaching a particular subject at a specific level within their country. The process of hiring such educators is thorough, and educational institutions test various candidates to make sure that they can teach appropriately, only with a sound understanding of their discipline, a sense of explaining difficult things with simplicity, and the correct way of solving students' questions and queries (Kivunja, 2015). Qualified educators thus hold significant importance in a society which sees education as the most paramount way of progress and development.

More profoundly, the competencies of a well-qualified teacher go beyond only being knowledgeable but also inspire, motivate, and engage their learners. This dynamic relationship between teacher qualifications and student outcomes underpins the need for rigorous standards in hiring and training educators. With this, the schools assume rigorous hiring approaches to ensure that teachers are imbued with the right kind of knowledge, skills, and attitude to establish an atmosphere that is most conducive for learning. Within the system, however, a lingering problem exists: it is assigning teachers to teach a subject other than their major, such as in the case of the non-Social Studies major teacher teaching Araling Panlipunan.

Out-of-field teaching is when students are assigned educators not appropriately qualified or prepared for the subject or grade level they have been assigned to teach. The practice has been described as one in which educators are assigned to teach subjects or grade levels for which they are not properly qualified or prepared. This practice is not peculiar to the Philippines and has largely been reported as one of the global concerns on education quality in varied contexts. This spawns from many factors, which range from teacher supply shortages to administrative decisions and infrastructural reasons. Regardless of the reasons, the implications brought about by out-of-field teaching are deep and multi-faceted. In a report furnished by DepEd in the Philippines (DepEd, 2020), it said that approximately 30% of teachers are assigned to teach subjects outside their

specialization, with a huge percentage of this being on Social Studies assignments.

This figure thus shows how big a concern this is and the likely effect on educational quality. It is when the teachers are put in a position to teach subjects they are not fully prepared for. When not equipped to deal with students who are highly disciplined and focused, the negative implications and consequences include reduced teacher confidence, unable to respond appropriately to student questions, and finally a complete lack of interest in the subject taught, which impacts engagement from the student and eventually learner outcomes (Pacana et al., 2019). In support of these findings, the study by Pacana et al. (2019) showed that about 35% of Araling Panlipunan teachers are not holders of a Social Studies-related degree. Deficient subject matter preparation due to the mere lack of formal education and training in the subject one is handling seriously handicaps the latter from delivering effective instruction.

Such quantitative studies, while informative in their own right, do not capture the personal challenges and coping mechanisms employed by these educators in everyday teaching efforts. It is this lacuna that underlines the need for in-depth qualitative research to capture these nuanced experiences of those teachers, offering insights into their struggles and the innovative methods they adopt to navigate the challenges of teaching outside their area of expertise. This qualitative study attempts to assess the challenges and coping mechanisms of teachers who are non-Social Studies majors handling Araling Panlipunan classes in junior high schools in Bulacan, Philippines. It shall, therefore, employ a phenomenological approach toward the following objectives: to wit, identify and describe the specific challenges of teaching Araling Panlipunan encountered by non-Social Studies major teachers; explore coping mechanisms resorted to by teachers to overcome the challenges of out-of-field teaching; and propose a program on capacitating non-Social Studies major teachers with valuable knowledge in contributing toward the development of policies and practices that support educators to deliver quality education regardless of teaching assignments.

It also offers real practical insights that could actually bridge the divide between policy and practice. Educational stakeholders can, from such an understanding of the lived experiences of these teachers, effectively support systems or professional development programs targeting teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes. The phenomenological approach of this study will, therefore, yield a thick description of the experiences of the teachers with emphasis on their personal and professional challenges and how they strive to surmount them. It is ultimately hoped that this research will add to the greater dialogue about educational quality and equity, ensuring that every student actually does receive a high standard of education irrespective of their teacher's background. It aims to inform the development of more effective policies and practices that support teachers in their roles, especially those teaching out of field.

Methodology

The present study followed a phenomenological research approach to capture the challenges and coping mechanisms in teaching Araling Panlipunan subjects as experienced by Non-Social Studies major teachers. Basically, a phenomenological approach to research is a qualitative approach that mainly aims to understand human experiences and perceptions of whatever phenomenon. Essentially, the methodology targets the unveiling of the essence of the phenomenon by exploring how individuals experience it. The objective of the study was to tell the story of the challenges that were faced by teachers who are majoring in something other than Social Studies and how they overcame them.

Sampling Method

The research had a purposive sampling method, where specific criteria were used in selecting the respondents. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2017), purposive sampling is suitable when researchers intend to sample people with special characteristics or lived experiences that are very important to the study. Respondents selected were newly hired Junior High School teachers of the Department

of Education Division of Bulacan teaching Araling Panlipunan subjects with zero to five years of teaching experience but whose baccalaureate degree was not related to any of the social studies curricula. It assured relevant and recent experiences pertinent to the objectives of the study by the participants.

Since it was difficult on some occasions to get an adequate number of respondents fitting the criteria, snowball sampling was also used in the research study. This is a non-probability sampling approach whereby existing respondents to the research are asked to contact others that may become future volunteers for the study (McLeod, 2022). The snowballing technique was useful where the teachers fitting the criteria were not readily available from the initial purposive sampling. This approach increased the possibility of getting more participants and getting an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The targeted number of study respondents was fifteen. This was later reduced to ten after the information obtained from the target reached data saturation. Data saturation normally depicts a qualitative research point where no new type of information or theme is identified. Determination of data saturation involved the constant analysis of data during the collection process. The process ended when successive interviews no longer generated new themes or insights, therefore assuring the researcher that data saturation had been reached. This ensured that the sample size was large enough to elicit comprehensive knowledge about the challenges and coping mechanisms of the teachers.

Data Collection and Interview Process

In-depth face-to-face and virtual interviews were employed in data collection for this study. The gatekeepers in this study were the School Principals whom the researcher had to approach first before the interviews could be allowed since they are the ones who gave access to the participants. The Division Office of Bulacan was contacted by the researcher for permission to be interviewed by potential participants. After a positive response from the Division Office, the school principals were

issued a letter of request for their participation in the study by the researcher. It was explained to the respondents verbally, in detail, in the office of the principal, and a Facebook Messenger notification detailing the study's purpose was considered to prioritize the convenience of the respondents as to the place and time for having interviews. It should bear the signature of an informed consent form by the respondents.

During the face-to-face interviews, an android mobile phone captured the audio while at the same time taking notes regarding the responses of every respondent. In the case of some respondents, there were scheduling conflicts, and thus virtual interviews via MS Teams were preferred. All data collected were kept in a Google Drive accessible only by the researcher for privacy and anonymity. The data collected were transcribed for further analysis.

The interview questions were semi-direct, open-ended questions designed to suit the case presented by the study. This researcher designed this from the study's research questions and validated the set questions with the assistance of three educationists, experts with knowledge in teaching Social Studies and developing instructional materials.

The data obtained from the personal interviews was audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded appropriately using Microsoft Office tools for oversight and easy summarization. The data analysis followed multiple phases. Thematic analysis was done using the manually coded data to determine the key themes and patterns emerging from the data. Thereafter, a further narrative analysis was conducted as a process for the understanding and analysis of data. Riessman (2017), referred to narrative analysis as a qualitative research method that involves the interpretation of stories or accounts of personal experiences. It is applied in the understanding of the meaning and significance of both the individual and collective experiences and the social and cultural contexts within which they take place.

The narrative analysis uncovered personal struggles and coping mechanisms of the Non-Social Studies major teachers in teaching Araling Panlipunan, thus contributing to valuable knowledge in the development of

policies and practice toward supporting educators in providing quality education, regardless of teaching assignment.

Results And Discussion

Challenges Faced

1. Construction of Lesson Plans

The qualitative study on Non-Social Studies Major Teachers teaching Araling Panlipunan in Junior High Schools in Bulacan, Philippines, revealed several key themes through in-depth interviews. One significant challenge identified was the construction of lesson plans.

A substantial portion of participants' responses highlight a range of challenges that Non-Social Studies major teachers face in constructing lesson plans for Araling Panlipunan subjects. Trigueros (2018) defines a lesson plan as an instrument that assists teachers in improving student learning. Creating a lesson plan is essential as it outlines the topics covered in class and determines the teaching approach.

R1: *"Maybe Ma'am, one of the most difficult things is motivation, finding motivation in the lesson plan because usually when they say that AP is boring, we should really find motivation that the child should enjoy."*

R9: *"It's hard to think of strategies for what to put in, what will suit each grade level I hold."*

R6: *"As a new teacher, it just changed a bit, but once I learned it was easy, because the MELCS was so new to me, I adjusted to that."*

R10: *"There are parts/components of the lesson plan in public school that have not been done in private school. There are times that are challenging, but I have co-teachers who are willing to help."*

R2: *"...because of course I'm not really an education graduate, I just did uniting... I did TLE, which is in English instruction and then the lesson proper was different up to evaluation part... then when I was here I was having a hard time because of course AP is in Tagalog instruction..."*

R4: *"...I adjusted because Math is English instruction while this one is Tagalog and I got used to typing, it was difficult for me."*

These responses indicate that Non-Social Studies major teachers encounter difficulties in constructing effective lesson plans for Araling Panlipunan subjects, including motivating students, adapting to new curriculum frameworks, and using different languages of instruction. These challenges align with broader challenges in lesson planning, such as avoiding overwhelming students with too many activities in a single lesson (IT blog, 2020). To address these challenges, teachers must remain flexible and leave room in their lesson plans for students to focus on specific issues. Additionally, weekly lesson planning is recommended to allow for adjustments based on students' needs. It is also crucial to remember that teachers do not need to complete everything on their lesson plans.

The experiences shared by Respondents 3, 5, 7, and 8 highlight the importance of having a well-structured and standardized approach to lesson planning. Their lack of challenges in creating lesson plans may be attributed to the convenience of having a standardized blueprint and instructional materials readily available. This emphasizes the significance of providing teachers with the necessary resources and tools to aid them in developing effective lesson plans. By doing so, teachers can focus on delivering quality instruction and providing students with engaging and meaningful learning experiences, ultimately leading to improved academic outcomes. Thus, it is crucial for educational institutions to invest in resources that support effective lesson planning and provide teachers with the support they need to succeed in their roles.

2. Knowledge on the Subject Matter

The mid-ground of the respondents' feedback places into clear context an important aspect of their challenge: limited knowledge on the subject matter that may be related to what they are expected to teach. Knowledge of subject matter is one of the key

components in forming an effective learning environment, one of which Luft's journal (2020) explicated. This simply explains the mastery of the subject to be tackled as part of the instructor's knowledge. It encompasses knowledge about the subject matter, but also the interdisciplinary links and the changes that are going on over a period of time within the topic. Therefore, at a basic level, the continuous increment of the subject knowledge of the teacher is of great importance for the students to gain a rich and meaningful learning experience.

R1: *"...since...history are facts and you are going to present it...we really need to have...we will relate to what is happening now so they can better understand for example the world wars we will connect to what is happening today, chaotic places."*

R2: *"Yes, it's hard... those are facts, you can't change history... it's necessary when you take something out of your mouth to a child, it's hard to take it back... what I do before I teach a lesson is I do some research and then I read it..."*

R4: *"In terms of content, since it doesn't align with what I graduated from...I watch on YouTube first, I study first."*

R10: *"There are times that I don't know about in the lesson plan, but I can learn thru reading, research, I can cope up a bit."*

R7: *"I'm refreshing, I'm really reading now, but my strength is World History since I'm a High School student."*

This passage throws light on the common theme of limited subject matter knowledge among the respondents. Quotes by the respondents explain the challenges they meet teaching a subject that might not have been their major at college or experience gained. The teachers clearly recognize that content knowledge is important and make efforts to improve their knowledge of the subject matter through research and reading.

The passage shows the central place of subject matter knowledge in effective teaching and the continuous struggle an educator

has to undertake to be up-graded at all times. The difficulties which made the subject matter connect with current affairs and other disciplines to make the understanding by students possible were realized by the respondents. In that way, teachers can make learning more meaningful and enriching for the learners. Basically, one is again reminded that good teaching requires much in the way of subject matter expertise and that obtaining and keeping it poses some real problems for teachers.

The previous response analysis also connected to the second chapter study by Abella (2021), as both relate to challenges some teachers without subject matter expertise face. What the analysis points out the most is the way the existence of subject matter knowledge forms an effective learning environment. The study presented by Abella, on the other hand, showed the challenges posed to teachers in the absence of subject matter expertise. In sum, what these sources try to explain is the fact that teachers need to work on their subject matter knowledge to deliver the most meaningful experience to students.

The results from respondents 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9 indicate that appropriate resources and previous knowledge about the subject matter are clear advantages. This goes to underline the importance of preparedness, which several studies on best teaching practices stress: knowing what to teach. According to Loughran et al. (2016), it is a teacher's pedagogical content knowledge that includes both content knowledge and knowledge about how to teach that content, that helps in creating a conducive learning environment. In such a case, when the teacher has subject matter expertise and resources needed to facilitate student learning and engagement, the students will learn effectively.

3. Assessment Design

The designing of assessments is, therefore, a significant challenge for a considerable proportion of educators; this was evidenced by the concern raised by 40% of the participants in this study and supported by the definition provided by Brown and Lunn (2017), referring to assessment design as a

systematic plan for evaluating learners' knowledge, skills, and abilities.

R1: *"Maybe it's also difficult when... doing an essay because sometimes it's the children who put it in... when you tell them 3 sentences they just make sentences even if it has nothing to do with it. It is not related Ma'am."*

R2: *"...because of course history is more on memorization, it seems like you can't assess that the kid here is good because for example, he doesn't excel in my subject, but in other subjects, for example, Math and English, he is good.... When it comes to essays of course you will read it."*

R3: *"That's because we know that children in public school are not like in private school, when you ask them to memorize, they really focus..."*

R8: *"After lesson, only a few pass the exam, in the quizzes they are okay, in the exam only a few reach a passing score."*

The problems the interviewees had in assessing student learning, as was responded to by all of them, were on such areas of critical thinking and writing skills, traditional assessment methods, social and economic factors, and the need for the employment of assessments targeting higher-order thinking skills. By responses, these issues were thereby put as priorities in assessment design to measure student learning outcome and underscored the complexities involved in assessment design.

Another connection to this review can be associated with Monica's study (2020), with the analysis of challenges the participants faced in assessing their students' learning. As substantiated by the mentioned difficulties of the participants concerning assessment design, in general, the study identifies appropriate methods for assessment and development, which would be reliable and valid measures for evaluating student performance. Monica's study also brings out the challenge of controlling test time and getting the students to pass the test without cheating, which could be due to conventional techniques of assessment. The two studies

identify the complicated nature of designing assessment tools and the fact that there is a need to find ways of overcoming the challenges if one is to conduct an effective assessment of the student's outcome.

The views expressed by these respondents reveal the benefits of departmentalization with regard to the design of assessment tools. In addition, respondents 10, 5, and 7 commented on the need for access to test banks and standardised examination tools as a means of ensuring that the assessment tools used in one's teaching are of a high quality. Division of labor of this sort can also bring efficiency and productivity gains when preparing and administering assessments. On the other hand, respondents 9 and 6 described how this freedom may benefit the application of diagnostic examination and design evaluation methods without limitation, making the assessment design process more convenient. The consideration on both sides defines the significance of the availability of resources and flexibility in assessment design to meet the objectives of learning and students' needs.

Coping Mechanisms of Teachers

1. Resourcefulness

Of the common coping mechanisms of Non-Social Studies Major Teachers teaching Araling Panlipunan in junior high schools in Bulacan, Philippines, resourcefulness stands out as one in this qualitative study. Coping mechanisms put forward by the teachers underline the creativity and ingenuity to surmount the problems encountered with a subject outside of their expertise. One of the very useful qualities in teaching is resourcefulness. This is a virtue that allows teachers to overcome different situations and come up with alternative ways of solving problems.

R4: *"Sometimes I also connect with other subjects, like in my Math, I say this happened at the same time."*

R2: *"...if they are really too noisy... you give them the freedom to present a particular topic but they have to relate it to the lesson of the day."*

R9: *"...what I do, when it comes to related terms, I create a quiz that's sort of fill-in-the-blanks or the child will do a project on the map, they will draw, then they will put the names of the places we have discussed."*

These responses show that teachers use various methods to make their classes more relevant and interesting to learners. The subject is related to other disciplines; the students are allowed to make presentations, and innovative modes of continuous assessment are used to ensure learning is cemented. It is this practice that seems to confirm a commitment to offering quality education despite the subject matter incompetence by the teachers.

Resourcefulness is not only a means of survival but also part of good teaching practice. It helps a teacher generate a dynamic interactive learning environment, hence able to engage students toward better learning achievements. By being resourceful, teachers are able to transcend the limitations of their background and offer their students a rich, diverse educational experience.

2. Collaboration and Networking

The study also established that collaboration and networking are key coping mechanisms for Non-Social Studies major teachers. In the light of this, their responses have thrown up issues of sharing challenges with colleagues, continuous professional development, and sharing resources and best practices.

R5: *"I ask for help from my colleagues who are experts in Araling Panlipunan."*

R7: *"...I attend seminars and workshops related to Araling Panlipunan to improve my knowledge and teaching skills."*

R8: *"...I join online forums and social media groups where teachers share lesson plans, teaching strategies, and resources."*

These responses indicate that teachers value collaboration and actively seek to enhance their knowledge and skills. This approach will carry them through many of the

challenges of teaching outside one's area of expertise, as they can gain easy access to a great variety of resources and supports through engaging with peers and participating in professional development activities.

It aids in professional growth and development through collaboration and networking. Teachers learn from one another, sharing experience in building a sense of community. Through a culture of collaboration, schools have the capacity to create an environment that empowers teachers in the provision of the best learning experience toward their learners.

3. Continuous Learning

Continuous learning was another coping mechanism identified in the study. It shows a commitment of the teachers toward continuous professional development and self-improvement. Continuous learning is a requisite in keeping abreast with the latest trends in education, research, and best practice.

R1: *"I regularly read books and articles about history and teaching strategies to improve my knowledge and skills."*

R3: *"...I enroll in online courses and attend webinars to enhance my understanding of the subject matter."*

R6: *"...I seek feedback from my students and colleagues to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments."*

These responses indicate that the teachers look for avenues to learn constantly. Only by keeping themselves abreast of the latest in education can a teacher enhance his or her effectiveness as a teacher and provide a high-order learning experience to the learners.

Continuous learning is a part of professional development. It enables the teacher to sharpen his or her skills, broaden knowledge, and be responsive to the changing needs of students. With this attitude, a teacher is learning continuously and has an opportunity to remain engaged and motivated with his or her profession, leading to positive consequences for students and the educational community at large.

4. Determination to Provide Quality Education

There is persistence in the response of teachers in the Non-Social Studies major despite strong challenges. Their responses indicate strong commitment toward their students' learning and success and going the extra mile for the same.

R2: *"I want to make sure that my students understand the importance of history and how it relates to their lives."*

R3: *"...I strive to create a positive and inclusive learning environment where all students feel valued and supported."*

R6: *"...I am dedicated to continuous improvement and always seek ways to enhance my teaching and better serve my students."*

These responses evidence the fact that responsibility and dedication towards students are what motivate the teachers. They are very much aware of their responsibility to provide high-quality education and giving time and effort for it.

Determination is a major driving force of success in education. It is the fuel behind teachers' being passionate and dedicated to the teaching profession, hence being able to overcome any obstacles and impacting students' lives. This way, cultivating a culture of determination and resilience will allow a school to keep teachers so as to ensure students receive the best education possible.

This qualitative research has focused on the challenges faced by Non-Social Studies Major Teachers teaching Araling Panlipunan in Junior High Schools and the coping methods that they employ. Among the major findings of the study includes that resourcefulness, collaboration, networking, and continuous learning are key strategies that could help overcome challenges. Against all odds, however, the teachers show a rather strong determination for quality education driven by a commitment to students' learning and well-being.

The study pushes the initiative forward to extending help towards Non-Social Study major teachers in their aspiration for more effective instruction in Araling Panlipunan.

In this light, teachers' training of resources, practice, and a conducive environment shall be afforded by their school institutions. The latter shall eventually translate to effective learning outcomes among students for an inclusive and just education system.

Proposed Program

The "*Capacitating the Competence of Non-Social Studies Major Teachers*" program is designed to solve problems encountered by teachers who are not a social studies major teaching Araling Panlipunan. This program is inserted in the general findings of the study that indicate low teaching quality in out-of-field teachers that needs to be supported and guided. Therefore, the program objectives were set to fill in these gaps in expertise by providing relevant skills and knowledge through seminars, workshops, and training, based on identified challenges such as lesson planning, subject matter knowledge, assessment design, and intervention plans. Examples of such sessions include those on lesson planning, content and pedagogy of social studies, assessment, and intervention plans for the purposes of empowering teachers with effective strategies and tools to engage students and bring in improved educational outcomes. It aims to raise the quality of instruction in Araling Panlipunan and improve the social studies curriculum by equipping non-major teachers with the necessary competencies in teaching the former.

Conclusions/Recommendations

It is where the study's conclusions were almost identical to its findings: that although teaching Araling Panlipunan subjects was a significant challenge for the Non-Social Studies major teachers, their sincerity to give quality education allowed them to overcome these. This was tantamount to saying that these teachers had problems composing lesson plans, mastering subject matter, and formulating assessment tools. They use coping mechanisms: collaboration, available resources, and professional development. In the commitment to quality education, they are empowered for continuous teaching practice improvement.

Drawing from these challenges, a number of specific and action-oriented recommendations are hereby made. First, the need to formulate a comprehensive training program aimed at enhancing the skills and knowledge of Non-Social Studies major teachers: this includes workshops in curriculum development, content mastery, and assessment design training. In this regard, the need to establish a VPLC that would enable teachers to meet for continuous collaboration, sharing of ideas, mentorship programs, and resource sharing can be recommended. Thirdly, a centralized Teaching Aids Bank should be established for the purpose of providing digital and physical teaching aids. Fourthly, continuous professional development through seminars, training programs, and subject matter-related fields, pedagogical skills, and technology integration need to be provided. Fifthly, the pursuit of a Master's degree by teachers—aided by scholarship and flexible scheduling mechanisms—will go much towards furthering expertise. It must be realized further by advanced degrees in terms of the research on career advancement, teaching effectiveness, and professional satisfaction. Through this, with the recommended actions, the educational institution can facilitate the concerns of Non-Social Studies major teachers in handling the challenges of teaching Araling Panlipunan to improve the quality of education among learners.

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