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Lived Experiences of Faculty Members Handling Core Subjects in the Elementary Education Programme

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Abstract. Teaching is not only a profession but also a vocation that demands both expertise and commitment. This study explored the lived experiences of faculty members handling core subjects in the elementary education programme of a state university. Using a qualitative descriptive design, six faculty members from the College of Education were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Findings revealed two themes regarding teachers' experiences: (1) mastery and relevance of core subjects and (2) commitment to assigned tasks. Strategies employed in teaching included (1) applying innovative instructional approaches and (2) maintaining a positive mindset toward required proficiencies. Challenges encountered highlighted three themes: (1) students' perceptions of lesson planning, (2) additional workloads, and (3) the inherent demands of core subjects. To cope with these, participants reported (1) establishing strong relationships with students, (2) employing differentiated instruction, and (3) fostering an encouraging classroom atmosphere. Overall, the study demonstrates that while faculty members face considerable challenges in teaching core subjects, their sense of dedication and passion enables them to navigate difficulties and sustain effective instruction. The findings offer practical implications for higher education institutions to provide stronger support systems, reduce workload burdens, and enhance professional development opportunities, ultimately improving both teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

Keywords: core subjects; coping practices; faculty members; institutional support; student learning outcomes

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1. Introduction

Teacher's lived experiences have been the subject of extensive research, given the wide range of professional and personal challenges they encounter. Teaching extends beyond classroom instruction, as teachers also act as mentors, counsellors, and role models in guiding students' academic and personal growth. Wong et al. (2021) emphasise that teachers play crucial roles in providing career-related support, including mentoring, counselling, and role modelling, which significantly influence students' planning and decision-making for their future.

Faculty members in teacher education programmes face even greater demands, as they are expected to supervise lesson planning, observe demonstration teaching, and guide the professional and personal development of future educators. The heavy workload often assigned to such teachers can undermine their efficiency and morale if not aligned with their expertise.

In the Philippine context, Ancho and Bongco (2019) explored the professional workload of Filipino teachers and found that overwhelming demands often compromise their instructional effectiveness and well-being. Studies further emphasise that poorly managed workloads, coupled with excessive non-academic tasks, negatively affect teaching performance and student outcomes (Ayeni & Amawekne, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Meador, 2019). Excessive pressure can also diminish classroom quality and student achievement, underscoring the need for institutional support and fair workload systems (Sharma & Jyoti, 2009; Werang, 2018).

Utomo (2018) highlighted that the complex tasks and responsibilities involved in achieving educational goals are closely tied to teacher motivation, as strong intentions foster productive teaching practices. Similarly, Ofoegbu (2004) emphasised that motivation is largely influenced by the fulfilment of teachers' needs; when these needs are met, teachers remain motivated, but when unmet, their effectiveness in shaping learners' minds may be compromised. Thus, it is essential for the Department of Education to address the issues and challenges teachers face in managing multiple roles and responsibilities to sustain both motivation and productivity (Sharma & Jyoti, 2009). Werang's (2018) study further underscored the link between teachers' workloads, personal characteristics, and emotional well-being, demonstrating how these factors collectively impact teaching performance.

Within teacher education, core subjects are central as they prepare future teachers for professional practice (CHED, 2017; Cambridge, 2019). These include areas such as Teaching English, Science, and Mathematics, which require not only mastery of content but also effective pedagogical skills. A major requirement in these subjects is lesson planning and demonstration teaching, both of which pose unique challenges. Lesson planning, while crucial for structured instruction, is often perceived by pre-service teachers as time-consuming and difficult, particularly in formulating objectives and sequencing activities (Zingir Gülten, 2013). Teachers likewise face frustration in reviewing numerous lesson plans, especially when students fail to apply suggested revisions (Rusznayak & Walton,

2011). Despite these challenges, lesson planning remains essential for ensuring organised and effective classroom instruction.

Similarly, demonstration teaching is regarded as an effective strategy for developing teaching competencies. Studies show that it enhances instructional techniques, encourages active student engagement, and provides opportunities for applying theory to practice (Damian et al., 2021; Orosz et al., 2023). In the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) programme, demonstration teaching is mandated in all core subjects to ensure comprehensive teacher preparation (Department of Education, 2020). However, faculty members supervising these activities often report difficulties, including the time-intensive process of reviewing lesson plans, students' negative perceptions of demonstration requirements, and the additional workload tied to monitoring teaching performance.

Given these realities, the present study addresses a gap in the literature by focusing specifically on the lived experiences of faculty members handling core subjects in the BEED programme. While prior research has explored teachers' workloads and pre-service teaching challenges more broadly, little attention has been given to the unique struggles and coping mechanisms of those directly supervising lesson planning and demonstration teaching. By foregrounding these experiences, the study provides valuable insights that can inform institutional policies on workload distribution, professional development, and support mechanisms for faculty members in teacher education.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored by the reflective practice theory, a framework recognised for fostering professional growth in education. Reflective practice, defined as "learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice" (Finlay, 2008, p. 1), involves examining experiences, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and applying insights to improve practice. In teaching, where decision-making and problem-solving are constant, reflection helps navigate complex classroom realities. This study uses the framework to analyse the lived experiences of lecturers handling core subjects, highlighting how they address challenges, employ coping strategies, and refine instruction.

Reflection fosters adaptability, deeper pedagogical understanding, and responsiveness to diverse learning contexts (Larrivee, 2000; Schön, 1983), supporting continuous improvement in teaching and enhancing student outcomes (Brookfield, 2017). It also has institutional implications, guiding administrators in equitable workload allocation and prioritising core tasks, like lesson planning and demonstration teaching, to prevent burnout (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Moreover, participants' coping strategies may serve as transferable best practices, equipping future teachers with adaptive tools and strengthening professional culture, thereby contributing to higher-quality instruction and improved educational outcomes.

2.1 Study's Aim and Research Questions

The study's aim was to examine the lived experiences of lecturers handling core subjects in the BEED programme of a State University in Pampanga. Specifically, it sought to address the following questions:

1. How do participants characterise their lived experiences of teaching core subjects within the BEED programme?
2. What instructional strategies do participants employ to facilitate the effective teaching of core subjects?
3. What challenges do participants encounter in the delivery of these subjects?
4. What coping mechanisms do participants adopt to manage the demands of teaching core subjects?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design, particularly the descriptive approach. The qualitative descriptive design, as described by Sandelowski (2000), is particularly well-suited to this study's aim of understanding the lived experiences of faculty members handling core subjects. By focusing on providing a rich, straightforward description of participants' experiences, this approach ensures that findings remain grounded in the data, offering practical insights.

3.2 Study Sample

Non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, was used to determine the participants. The participants of the study are six (6) faculty members handling core subjects in the elementary education programme, and they were required to fulfil the following criteria: (1) faculty under the College of Education with three years' experience in teaching core subjects in the elementary education; (2) experience with the tedious part of teaching core subjects, specifically the checking of lesson plans and demonstration teaching observation; and (3) experience with different challenges in handling the core subjects.

3.3 Data Collection Method and Process

The researchers used a semi-structured interview guide to gather details relating to their experiences in handling core subjects in the elementary education programme. The researchers sought consent from different experts to validate the questionnaire before conducting the interview. After a thorough evaluation from the experts, the researchers then proceeded to collect data from the respondents.

Participants of the study were interviewed using a face-to-face set-up, after class hours, at a time most convenient for them in the faculty room. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit comprehensive responses about their experiences. Participants of the study were informed about the purpose of the interview. They were free to share their thoughts and ideas about their challenges and experiences in implementing demonstration teaching in the subjects they were handling. English was the medium of communication used during interviews.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were transcribed and subjected to reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006). This is a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data and is particularly useful in qualitative research where the goal is to explore the perspectives and experiences of participants.

This method is an iterative process consisting of six steps: (1) familiarisation with the data, where the researchers immerse themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the content to become intimately familiar with it; (2) coding, which involves highlighting interesting features and noting down initial ideas; (3) searching for themes and gathering all relevant coded data together; (4) reviewing themes, which may involve splitting, combining, or discarding themes; (5) defining and naming themes, where each theme should be clearly defined and given a descriptive name; and (6) writing up, which is the final step that involves weaving together the narrative and data extracts, contextualising the analysis within existing literature, and discussing the implications of the findings. A manual coding process was employed in analysing the transcriptions.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The entire process of the interview observed the principles of ethics, which were a key consideration in every step of this research. The consent of the participants was obtained before conducting the interviews/study. Participants' privacy and anonymity were also considered, and their identities and personal information were kept confidential. The information that they provided was treated with the utmost confidentiality, and they had the authority to withdraw at any time. The researchers also maintained reflexivity by acknowledging and reflecting on their own biases and influence on the research process.

3.6 Establishment of Trustworthiness and Rigour

The study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria - credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability - to ensure rigour in qualitative research. Credibility was established through participant checking, allowing respondents to review and confirm that their accounts were interpreted accurately. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions to enable applicability in other contexts. Dependability was achieved through expert peer review, with feedback carefully considered by the researchers. Confirmability was ensured by documenting a transparent, step-by-step account of the research procedures, from data collection to final analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

The data collected were analysed accordingly through repeated reading. The statements were grouped according to their relevance to the study. Codes were also used to combine related data. The findings, after thoroughly employing content analysis, explicated overarching themes that shed light on the lived experiences of the faculty members handling core subjects in the elementary education programme.

Table 1: Summary of themes and sub-themes

Participants' Experiences in Handling Core Subjects	<i>Theme 1: Mastery and Relevance of Core Subjects</i> <i>Theme 2: Commitment To the Task</i>
Strategies in Teaching Core Subjects	<i>Theme 1: Innovative Teaching Approaches in Core Subjects</i> <i>Theme 2: Positive Mindset Regarding the Required Proficiencies</i>
Challenges Encountered in Handling Core Subjects	<i>Theme 1: Students' Perceptions of Lesson Planning and Demonstration Teaching</i> <i>Theme 2: Additional Workloads Delegated to the Teacher</i> <i>Theme 3: Demands of the Subjects</i>
Coping Practices of the Teachers Handling Core Subjects	<i>Theme 1: Establish Relationship with the Students</i> <i>Theme 2: Employ Differentiated Instructions</i> <i>Theme 3: Initiate an Encouraging Atmosphere</i>

4.1 Participants' Experiences in Handling Core Subjects

Faculty members who handle core subjects shared their valuable experiences in doing so. Recent studies have explored various aspects of teaching core subjects, highlighting both challenges and effective approaches (Pagente et al., 2024). The following themes presented the participants' unique experiences in handling core subjects.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Mastery and relevance of core subjects

Subject mastery is crucial for quality teaching, as it enables teachers to grasp main points, correct misconceptions, and impart knowledge effectively (Kamamia & Thinguri, 2014). Teaching core subjects is not easy as it requires a lot of patience and dedication of teachers' time and effort. Faculty members need to always update themselves on the latest trends being used in the field, specifically in the field of elementary education, where a series of activities are always being implemented for their learners. Handling the subject for a couple of years is an advantage, as teachers master the competencies they need to impart to their students.

Moreover, the relevance of subjects in educational curricula is a multifaceted issue explored from various angles. Guerrero-Erazo et al. (2020) developed a quantitative index to measure subject relevance based on credits, prerequisites, and curriculum position. They saw that writing lesson plans and having demonstration teaching were effective techniques for handling the subject.

"I've been handling core subjects for six years, which made it easy for me. Demo teaching is a requirement stated in the compendium." (P2)

"The requirements of core subjects are important as training grounds for would-be teachers." (P3)

"I've been assigned with these subjects since 2015." (P4)

"Oh my ... so for three years already. Students need lesson planning and demonstration teaching to establish their knowledge in teaching and assessing their students in Araling Panlipunan/Social Studies." (P6)

4.1.2 Theme 2: Commitment to the task

In independent study programmes, high levels of task commitment have been observed, contributing to the development of competent and resilient graduates who are prepared for the workforce (Tsamara et al., 2024). Overall, task commitment appears to be a significant factor in promoting discipline, consistency, and a strong work ethic across various contexts, from academic settings to professional environments. Participants stated that their experience handling core subjects strengthened their sense of commitment towards work. It is this strong dedication that intensified their desire to make their students completely embrace the art of writing lesson plans and turning this academic blueprint into an artistic and inspiring demonstration of teaching.

"It is really tedious, but I live to what I commit as an educator." (P1)

"I always give my full commitment to every subject assigned to me." (P3)

"Teaching core subjects has never been easy for me, but my sworn commitment to the profession made me get through it." (P4)

4.2 Strategies in Teaching Core Subjects

Effective teaching strategies are crucial for enhancing student performance in core subjects. To address the demands of evolving curricula, educators are encouraged to employ a variety of teaching strategies beyond traditional lectures (Achor, 2023). Strategies in teaching should always be unique so that students are challenged to always give their best.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Innovative teaching approaches in core subjects

Awareness of one's teaching style can help educators better understand and improve their interactions with students (Evans et al., 2008). As the curricula evolve, faculty should also incorporate diverse and creative teaching techniques, as these become increasingly important for effective instruction in various educational settings. Most of the participants stated that they use varied and differentiated instruction in teaching. Participants see that they incorporate innovations in their teaching to keep the lesson interesting and engaging.

"I enjoy the Socratic method of teaching, or the question-and-answer method to check the understanding of the students during discussions. I also use inductive and deductive methods, cooperative learning, and constructivism" (P1 and P3)

"Lecture discussion, brainstorming, project-based learning strategies, and scaffolded learning strategies are what I practiced." (P2)

"Inquiry-Based Learning, Interactive Discussion, Role Playing, and Online Simulations and Teaching Demonstration." (P4)

4.2.2 Theme 2: Positive mindset regarding the required proficiencies

The emphasis on required proficiencies in various fields is crucial for professional success. Educational interventions should promote growth mindsets through continuous learning motivation, recognizing that learning extends beyond traditional institutional boundaries (Abdillah, 2023). Participants stated that, at the start of the semester, students were made aware of the possibility of having varied activities in the subject, like demonstration teaching, and requirements that would show their creativity and productivity. This establishes a positive mindset in the students, as they are already aware of the tasks at hand. The statements below show how the participants instilled responsiveness to the subjects' demands in their students.

"Students are aware of the demands of the subjects, the activities they need to do, the major requirements, etc., to promote lifelong learning."
(P1 and P4)

"From Day 1, students are already oriented on the requirements of the subject with emphasis on demonstration teaching and lesson planning."
(P2)

"Experiential learning through demonstration teaching is a must. They are also expected to write both detailed and semi-detailed lesson plans."
(P5)

4.3 Challenges Encountered in Handling Core Subjects

When teaching the core subjects in elementary education, faculty face several challenges across different levels. To address these challenges, various strategies have been proposed, such as employing metacognitive approaches like contextualised scientific dictionaries to enhance literacy (Manila, 2024). Additionally, integration of technology is also recommended to empower students in dealing with future technological issues.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Students' perception of lesson planning and demonstration teaching

Research on lesson planning and demonstration teaching reveals several key insights. Lesson planning is considered crucial for effective teaching, but pre-service teachers often struggle with this complex process (Çiğdem Şahin-Taşkın, 2017; Dube et al., 2021). Most of the students viewed it somewhat negatively, because it adds to their burden and requires a lot of time for planning and execution.

"Most of the students react negatively whenever lesson planning and demonstration teaching is mentioned." (P1 and P5)

"My students hate writing LPs [lesson plans] and are nervous to do DTs." (P3)

"The students are not confident enough to conduct demonstration teaching." (P6)

4.3.2 Theme 2: Additional workloads delegated to the teacher

Into and Gempes (2018) categorised teachers into two groups: teachers with additional functions and teachers without additional functions. Teachers' additional functions may include being coordinators in areas of research, extension, training, production, and discipline. They may also include being a chairman or member of an accreditation committee, being on the technical working committee of proposed projects, hosting or emceeing during programmes, participating in various events, and facilitating both teacher and student activities, among other functions.

Most of the teachers at the College of Education fall under this category. Only a few are classified as teachers without additional tasks. This situation demands much time, effort, and commitment on their part, making teaching more challenging.

"My other assignment [is] as the Quality Control Coordinator. I am also part of the Research Specialist for Social Science." (P1)

"I am the Extension Coordinator of the College who needs to make sure that there is at least one or two extension activities per semester." (P2)

"Other than handling a core subject, I am also part of the Accreditation Team for Area 2- Faculty." (P4)

"Teaching is not plain teaching these days; teachers need to be researchers, coordinators, extensionists, etc." (P5)

4.3.3 Theme 3: Demands of the subjects

Research indicates that subject-specific demands significantly impact teaching and learning processes. Different subjects require distinct knowledge, modes of inquiry, and discursive practices, influencing curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher expertise (Crisan & Hobbs, 2019). In elementary education, each core subject has distinct requirements for passing, which often compels faculty members to make slight adjustments in their teaching strategies to ensure that students do not perceive these requirements as overwhelming.

Despite these efforts, teachers have limited flexibility, as they must strictly adhere to the standards and expectations of each subject. Consequently, this rigid structure demands significant time and effort from teachers, particularly in checking and correcting students' work, which adds to their instructional workload.

"Our students seem not ready with the requirements of the subject." (P1)

"Adjustment is not easy since I have students using varied skill levels and levels of understanding, the demand for being extra patient is a must." (P2)

"It is very tedious but checking students' lesson plans and observing them during their demonstrations are ways to ensure the students know the rudiments of teaching." (P5)

4.4 Coping Practices of the Teachers Handling Core Subjects

Teachers handling core subjects face various challenges and employ diverse coping strategies. Common difficulties include addressing student misconceptions, integrating real-life examples, and dealing with students' weak foundations (Navos et al., 2024). Patadilla-Naquines and Bandala (2023) highlighted that these challenges include difficulties in managing instructional delivery, adjusting to digital platforms, and maintaining student engagement in remote or blended settings. Coping mechanisms include time management, communication, optimism, and adapting to new teaching approaches. Faculty in the field always need to find ways to cope with the following challenges that they encounter.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Establishing relationships with the students

Building positive teacher–student relationships is crucial for students' academic success and motivation (Suryani, 2019; Zelihic, 2015). By prioritising positive relationships, teachers can provide essential support for students, helping them navigate both academic and life challenges (Suryani, 2019; Wahl-Alexander, 2022). Constant motivation of students is a good way to sustain rapport with them.

"Teachers handling core subjects should have a good relationship with their students to easily motivate them." (P1)

"I keep on motivating them, pushing them beyond their limits. It's not that different because they do trust me." (P2)

"I set rules. I set up a relationship. I planned everything." (P5)

4.4.2 Theme 2: Employing differentiated instruction

Differentiated instruction is an educational approach that tailors teaching methods to accommodate diverse student needs, abilities, and learning styles within the same classroom (Blaz, 2023). Implementation involves adapting learning materials, instructional processes, assessments, and the learning environment to meet individual student requirements (Susanti et al., 2024). Some of the participants stated that, instead of having individual activities, they use group activities not only to lessen students' burden but also to give them time to do other curricular activities.

"Instead of individual demo teaching, I used group teaching demo." (P1)

"I adjust instruction to fit the students' needs." (P2)

"I incorporated different teaching strategies which the students could also adopt in their teaching demo." (P3)

"Adjustment of schedules. Utilising technology." (P5)

"Collaborative Learning and Interactive Discussions are practiced. This provides the students the avenue to help each other come up with creative outputs needed for their demonstration teaching." (P6)

4.4.3 Theme 3: Initiating an encouraging atmosphere

Creating an encouraging atmosphere in educational settings is crucial for fostering learning and positive behaviour. Teachers can establish a supportive environment by using effective praise and feedback, which helps prevent problem behaviours and promotes engagement (Conroy et al., 2009). When students feel tired of all the tasks being assigned to them, their mentors are there to guide them and provide motivation to continue and complete what they have started.

"Whenever my students feel that they cannot do it, I encourage them. I will give positive remarks for them not to give up." (P1)

"I ensure my students that I will guide them the best I can." (P2)

"As a teacher, I (we) would always serve as their model." (P3)

"I say things that will encourage them to exert more effort." (P4)

"Positive vibes are evident." (P5)

5. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of faculty members teaching core subjects in the elementary education programme. Experienced teachers, having mastered subject content through years of practice, navigate teaching challenges with greater ease and can emphasise the relevance of core subjects to students. Despite encountering difficulties, their commitment, passion, and dedication enable them to overcome obstacles while fostering similar traits in their students. These qualities also support flexibility, adaptability, and the incorporation of innovative teaching strategies. Moreover, teachers' resilience, patience, and compassion underpin their ability to manage complex tasks and multiple responsibilities effectively. As architects of future professionals, these educators demonstrate a readiness to face challenges, continuously improve their practice, and sustain the quality of teaching, ensuring both personal and student success.

6. Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is its reliance on faculty members' self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability or recall bias. Additionally, the focus on a specific area and small sample size limits the generalisability of the findings. While the qualitative approach provides in-depth insights, it may not capture the full range of experiences across diverse faculty members and educational settings. The perspectives of other stakeholders, such as parents, administrators, and students, were also not included, which could have enriched the understanding of faculty experiences. Future research could address these limitations by employing larger, more diverse samples, incorporating mixed method approaches to triangulate data, and including multiple stakeholder perspectives to enhance the comprehensiveness and applicability of the findings.

7. Recommendations and Future Implications

Based on the findings, several measures can enhance the experiences of faculty teaching core subjects in the elementary education programme. Institutions should provide continuous professional development tailored to elementary

educators, including training, seminars, and workshops on curriculum design, classroom management, and innovative teaching strategies. Faculty collaboration and the establishment of strong support systems can further improve teaching practices, while regular feedback and recognition can boost morale and job satisfaction. Academic leaders may also reduce non-teaching workloads to allow teachers to focus on lesson planning and demonstration teaching. Future research could explore comparative studies across institutions to deepen understanding of faculty experiences, guiding policies that strengthen support for educators and improve student outcomes.

8. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study. The research was conducted independently, and the findings reflect the experiences and perspectives of the faculty members without any influence from the university administration or external organisations.

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