

Multi-Grade Class Teaching: Challenges and Opportunities to Elementary School Teachers

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Abstract. This study examined the personal experiences, instructional challenges, and practical insights of thirteen public elementary teachers handling multi-grade classes in Marilog B District, under the Division of Davao City. Using a phenomenological approach, data were collected through one-on-one interviews and analyzed thematically to uncover authentic perspectives on multi-grade teaching in rural areas. The study revealed three prominent themes: teachers taking on expanded roles as creative instructional leaders, the emotional demands that shaped their resilience, and the development of teaching practices tailored to unique classroom realities. Despite facing limited institutional support, participants showed remarkable adaptability and a strong sense of commitment to their roles. Among the major challenges identified were overlapping teaching duties, time constraints, difficulty maintaining student engagement, and the lack of adequate materials and infrastructure. These challenges were intensified by the absence of formal training specifically for multi-grade instruction, forcing teachers to make constant adjustments and rely heavily on their own initiative. To cope, educators utilized differentiated strategies, peer-assisted learning, and flexible lesson planning. The study also surfaced valuable insights, including effective multi-level instruction, encouraging learner autonomy, and embracing challenges as opportunities for growth. Overall, the findings suggest that while multi-grade teaching demands extra effort, it fosters resilience, creativity, and professional maturity. The research calls for sustained teacher development programs, stronger policy frameworks, and active community participation to improve support systems for multi-grade educators. In conclusion, multi-grade teaching though complex offers rich opportunities for both teacher and learner development when supported appropriately.

KEY WORDS

1. Multi-grade teaching 2. lived experiences 3. instructional strategies

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1. Introduction

Teaching in multi-grade class is significantly more demanding than those in monograde classes, because teachers teach different subjects and topics at various grade levels while keeping all learners occupied with important work consistently. The educational programs and curriculum instructions are almost entirely monograde in context and timetables are not enough to achieve the educational needs of learners when applied in multi-grade classes setting (Akdas Kalman, 2021). Teachers also spent an inordinate amount of time preparing their own materials to teach in differentiated activities. In addition, they accommodate a

broader spectrum of learner abilities and developmental levels yet have limited time to address each student's individual needs or provide necessary remediation. Each grade level designed with its own set of learning goals and instructional outcomes, making it particularly difficult for teachers to meet all these expectations within a multi-grade setting. Additionally, most curriculum and textbooks tailored specifically for single-grade classrooms, which adds another layer of complexity when adapting them for multiple grade levels. Teachers managing multi-grade classes often face a heavy workload, especially in primary schools where they are not only responsible for academic instruction but also for managing various school events and co-curricular activities, all of which must be documented and reported as part of their duties. (Thomas, 2020). In addition, teachers experience stress and feel unhappy with the immense responsibilities and the additional tasks they needed to undertake with multi-grade class setting. Phonological differences present a significant challenge in the classroom, as learners primarily communicate in their native dialects. For teachers unfamiliar with these local languages, understanding and responding effectively can be difficult. Even when the dialect is comprehensible, variations in pronunciation and accent make meaningful communication more complex. This language barrier hinders the teacher's ability to build strong connections with students an essential aspect of effective teaching, especially at the elementary level. In India, multi-grade teaching is a widespread practice in elementary schools, particularly in rural areas where student populations are relatively small. However, this approach presents significant complexities and challenges for teachers. Managing multiple grade levels within a single classroom can be overwhelming and mentally taxing. Beyond classroom responsibilities, teachers often contend with external difficulties such as long and hazardous commutes,

poor road conditions, limited accessibility, and heavy workloads. Additional obstacles include frequent student absenteeism, social isolation, high expectations paired with limited parental support, lack of awareness among guardians, unfamiliar local dialects, and the physical strain of extended travel (Naparan Alinsug, 2021). Moreover, in recent years, multi-grade schools have continued to hold a prominent place in Turkey educational landscape. According to data from the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), approximately 28% This considerable percentage highlights the ongoing importance of multi-grade schooling in providing access to education, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Such schools remain vital in ensuring that students across the country can benefit from educational opportunities, regardless of geographic or demographic challenges. Teachers in multi-grade settings often encounter a unique set of difficulties that can significantly impact their well-being and professional effectiveness. Studies have shown that these challenges can lead to increased emotional strain, heightened burnout, and reduced job satisfaction. When left unaddressed, such issues may hinder a teacher's performance and, consequently, compromise the overall quality of education delivered in these classrooms. (Özdemir, Özdemir, Gül, 2020). Çiftçi and Cin (2018) emphasize a major challenge faced by rural schools in Turkey insufficient access to educational resources. This shortage plays a key role in reducing the overall quality of education and student performance. In addition, it affects teachers' job satisfaction, further deepening the gap between rural and urban educational experiences. In the Philippines, multi-grade teaching is widely implemented in rural areas, yet many teachers face significant challenges due to inadequate preparation. A major concern is the lack of proper training and exposure to current, effective teaching strategies suited for multi-grade settings. As a result, instructional quality and student learning in these

classrooms compromised (Du Plessis Mestry, 2019). In the locality of the researcher, particularly in Marilog B District, Davao City, though multi-grade teaching is still existent in some schools, the researcher has not found any conducted study that dwells on the intricacies of the issue on multi-grade teaching. These everyday challenges make Marilog B a meaningful and relevant place to better gain deeper insight into the personal and professional experiences of teachers handling multi-grade classrooms. Teaching in a multi-grade setting presents both significant challenges and valuable opportunities for professional growth (Vasquez-Martinez et al., 2021). To be effective in such classrooms, teachers must possess a solid foundation of professional knowledge, refined teaching skills, and a deep understanding of learners' diverse needs. According to Mendoza-Sintones (2019), multi-grade educators play a vital role in shap-

ing learners to become responsible and productive members of their communities. In this context, it is essential that teachers not only possess the necessary competencies but also successfully transfer this knowledge to students through meaningful and effective instruction (Trio Abocejo, 2019). To support student engagement and progress, multi-grade teachers required them to implement a variety of instructional strategies that minimize idle time and maintain student focus on an undeniably demanding task (Vasquez-Martinez et al., 2021). One persistent concern in rural multi-grade education is the limited access to specialized training for teachers. Despite initiatives and support provided by the Department of Education, many educators continue to experience difficulties in delivering quality instruction in multi-grade classrooms (Vasquez-Martinez et al., 2021).

1.1. Purpose of the Study—This phenomenological study aims to gain a deep understanding of the experiences and instructional practices of teachers handling multi-grade challenges and opportunities that could bring out the lead experiences of the elementary school teachers. This study aims to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the impact of multi-grade class teaching to Public Elementary School Teachers. Specifically, this study aims to explore how multi-grade class teaching affect the public elementary school teachers teaching practices and professional development. This includes on how public elementary school teachers interact during multi-grade class teaching and the challenges and possible opportunities they encountered. Moreover, this study aspires to develop insights from the findings of the information data gathered. The insights drawn for this study are useful contributions for the reasonable and logical implementation of multi grade class teaching. Moreover, this study contributes valuable insights aimed at supporting public elementary school teachers in effectively managing multi grade classrooms. Specifically, it aimed to draw significant information from the participants in terms of the lived experiences in their multi-grade class teaching experiences as drawn from the findings of the study that will be conducted in Marilog B District, Davao City Division.

1.2. Research Questions—The study aimed to examine the challenges and opportunities encountered by public elementary school teachers in multi-grade classrooms. Its direction established through the following specific research questions:

- (1) What are the lived experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade?
- (2) What are the issues/challenges they encounter?
- (3) What insights and lessons learned can be achieved in the study?

1.3. Significant of the Study—

This study proved to be beneficial to the Department of Education, school principals, teachers, and students.

Learners

As for learners, this will cater for their diverse learning needs that allow them to individually progress at their own pace. Also, it will not only enhance academic understanding but cultivates their social and emotional development as well.

Teachers

Teachers will also benefit from this study as it encourages a reflective approach to teacher preparation and ongoing professional development, fostering an environment where educators are well equipped to adapt to changing educational settings and diverse classroom situations.

School Principals

This study provided school principals with

valuable insights into the practices of multi-grade teaching. By gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that influenced instructional approaches in these settings, principals were able to develop and apply strategies aimed at enhancing teacher effectiveness and professional growth in multi-grade classrooms.

Department of Education

The findings of this study were intended to support the Department of Education in guiding educators, administrators, and policymakers in responding to the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers handling multi-grade classes. This investigation aimed to contribute to the creation of focused support mechanisms, professional growth initiatives, and informed policies that strengthened the efficiency and overall well-being of multi-grade educators.

1.4. Theoretical Lens—This study anchored in the educational theories of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, whose contributions provided a deeper understanding of learning in multi-grade settings. Their frameworks offered valuable insights not only into how children construct knowledge but also into how they become active participants in their learning communities. Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development emphasized that children learned best through direct, experiential processes. He posited that learners constructed meaning by interacting with their environment, continually reorganizing their mental frameworks through assimilation and accommodation. In a multi-grade classroom, these principles naturally emerged as younger students encountered advanced tasks that stretched their cognitive limits, while older students reinforced their learning by mentoring peers. This dynamic interaction fostered an environment conducive to developmental growth and cognitive equilibrium (Santos Ramirez, 2023). In contrast, Lev

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory stressed the importance of social interactions in cognitive development. He argued that meaningful learning occurred within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students could accomplish tasks with the assistance of more knowledgeable individuals. In multi-grade contexts, such support often developed organically, as older students assumed facilitative roles in academic and social tasks. Teachers acted as scaffolds, adjusting their guidance according to individual learner progress, which gradually decreased as students became more independent (Delos Reyes Bautista, 2024). By synthesizing Piaget's focus on individual cognitive stages with Vygotsky's emphasis on collaborative learning, this study adopted a socio-cognitive lens. This approach framed learning as both a personal and a social process. Multi-grade classrooms inherently supported this duality, offering a diverse learning environment where students could progress at their own pace while benefiting from peer and teacher support. Recent local

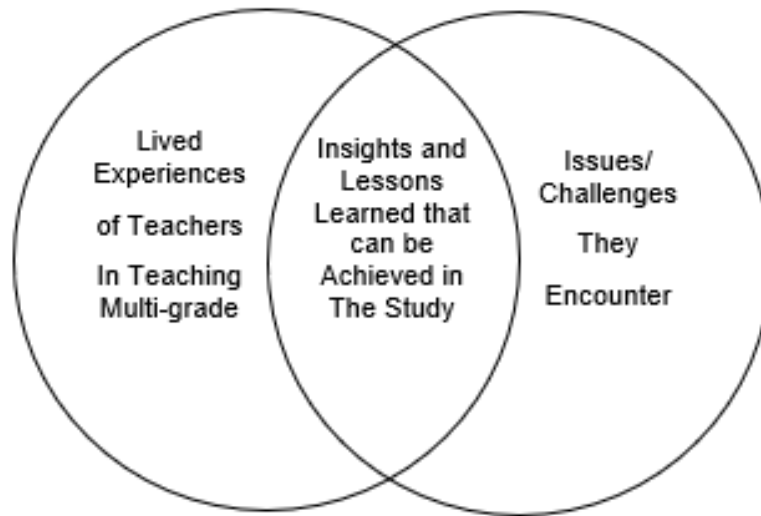


Fig. 1. The Conceptual Framework of the Study

studies have reinforced the effectiveness of this model. Research by Abuyo and Tamayo (2022) and Lantaca et al. (2023) highlighted that strategies such as peer tutoring, cooperative activities, and differentiated instruction significantly enhanced student performance in multi-grade settings. These findings affirmed the value of integrating individualized learning with collective educational experiences. The integration of Piagetian and Vygotskian perspectives underscored the complementary forces in multi-grade instruction: the intrinsic motivation to understand and the extrinsic guidance provided through social interaction. While Piaget encouraged exploration and self-discovery, Vygotsky emphasized mentorship and community-based learning—both of which were naturally fostered in classrooms that spanned multiple grade levels. Therefore, multi-grade teaching was not merely a response to logistical limitations in remote areas. Instead, it emerged as a dynamic pedagogical approach that nurtured holistic development, active engagement, and collaborative relationships grounded in shared learning and mutual support. The conceptual framework of the study is presented in figure 1. Based on the figure, there are three interconnected variables. These variables are the following: lived experiences of teachers in teaching multi-grade, issues/challenges they encounter, and insights and lessons learned that can be achieved in the study.

2. Methodology

This chapter detailed the methodology employed in the study, including the selection of participants, data collection procedures, the researcher's role, data analysis techniques, strategies for ensuring trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The exploration of facts and insights required a systematic design and implementation, which were thoroughly outlined in this section. The study utilized three widely recognized qualitative methods: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Each method chosen based on its suitability for capturing particular types of data. Participant observation was employed to document natural behaviors within familiar settings. In-depth interviews conducted to gather personal narratives, individual

perspectives, and experiences, especially on topics of a sensitive nature. Focus group discussions, on the other hand, provided insights into cultural norms and collective views within specific groups or communities. The research grounded in the phenomenological approach, a foundational tradition in qualitative inquiry focused on understanding lived human experiences. This method aims to describe how individuals perceived and interpreted a particular phenomenon within a shared context. As Creswell (2020) emphasized, phenomenology seeks to articulate what individuals experienced and how those experiences consciously interpreted. This approach has widely applied in disciplines such as education, psychology, and sociology, offering deep insights into the nature of human awareness. By analyzing participants lived experiences through interviews and observations, the study contributed to a more profound understanding of the subjective realities that shape human life.

2.1. Philosophical Assumptions—The philosophical assumption served as the foundational framework that guided the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation within the chosen field of inquiry. It provided the underlying perspective from which conclusions drawn and informed the researcher's decision-making process. These assumptions, which varied in type and purpose, were essential in shaping the methodological direction of the study. A well-conducted research endeavor typically began with the careful selection of a research topic, identification of a specific problem, and alignment with an appropriate philosophical paradigm (Creswell Poth, 2018). By establishing a clear philosophical stance, the researcher was able to maintain consistency and coherence throughout the research process. Furthermore, these assumptions influenced how knowledge viewed, what constituted valid evidence, and the role of values within the inquiry. Recognizing and articulating these assumptions allowed for greater transparency and rigor in qualitative research. According to Pretorius (2024), paradigms serve as a foundation that influences how we ask questions, gather data, and interpret meaning. In my case, I viewed each teacher's story not just as data, but as a window into their unique reality, something rich and worth understanding in its full context.

Ontology

This section of the research focused on the

ontological assumptions underlying the study, particularly concerning the nature of reality. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized that, within qualitative research, reality perceived as subjective and multiple shaped by individuals through their personal experiences. Similarly, Asmawi and Alam (2025) reiterated that recognizing the existence of multiple realities was essential for shaping an appropriate qualitative research design. In this study, the lived experiences of teachers handling multi-grade classrooms considered valid and diverse realities, accessed through their personal narratives. The study embraced the notion that reality co-constructed by all individuals involved in the research, including the participants, the researcher, and future readers of the findings. Accordingly, the investigation explored how teachers navigated the complexities of multi-grade teaching, focusing on the challenges they faced and the opportunities they identified for professional growth and development. Data collection relied on participants' voices and interpretations, which were presented through detailed quotations and thematic representations that reflected their individual perspectives. Participants' responses were systematically coded and analyzed to identify both shared patterns and unique insights. Great care was taken to ensure that the data handled with rigor and accuracy, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Throughout the research pro-

cess, I remained committed to preserving the authenticity of the participants' accounts and consciously minimized personal bias to maintain the integrity of the study.

Epistemology

This study was grounded in an epistemological stance that emphasized the importance of staying connected to participants to obtain direct, experiential knowledge. Creswell and Poth (2023) emphasized that qualitative research involves building knowledge through close interaction with participants, allowing researchers to co-construct meaning based on lived experiences. Similarly, Pretorius (2024) underscored the value of constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, which prioritize the collaborative construction of knowledge between researchers and participants. Guided by these perspectives, the study adopted a thematic, participant-centered analysis to deeply engage with the personal narratives of educators. Phenomenology, supported by thematic analysis, identified as the most appropriate approach to explore the essence of the teachers' experiences. In this context, the researcher's positionality reflected a conscious acknowledgment of their beliefs and interpretations, consistent with the nature of qualitative inquiry. The primary aim of the study was to collect rich, descriptive accounts from public elementary school teachers in Marilog B District, Davao City Division regarding their lived experiences in managing multi-grade classrooms.

Axiology

This portion of the research addressed the

role of values in the research process. According to Creswell (2020), values played a crucial role in shaping a study, particularly in qualitative inquiries. Axiology emphasized the importance of openly acknowledging the researcher's own values and recognizing how these may influence the interpretation of data, alongside the perspectives of the participants. Throughout the study, the researcher upheld the integrity and worth of all information provided by the participants. Recognizing the deeply personal and value-laden nature of the responses, the researcher took great care in preserving the authenticity of participants' insights. Interpretations were made thoughtfully, with respect to the meanings conveyed by the participants themselves. This values-driven approach ensured that the results remained respectful, credible, and rooted in a collaborative process of understanding.

Rhetoric

This meant conveying the realities as perceived and experienced by the research participants. It was essential for the study to present an objective account based on what genuinely observed and expressed by the teachers involved. The researcher employed a qualitative approach, using a personal narrative style and minimizing rigid definitions to maintain authenticity. In the context of this investigation, the first-person perspective adopted to accurately capture and reflect the lived experiences of educators managing multi-grade classrooms (Creswell Poth, 2018).

2.2. *Qualitative Assumptions*—Methodology was different from method. Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2021) critically note that failing to align methodology with method and disregarding the guiding philosophical stance undermines qualitative rigor and clarity in case study research. In this study, the experiences

of public elementary school teachers handling multi-grade classes in Marilog B District, Davao City Division were explored using in-depth interviews. I made sure to understand the deeper implications of multi-grade class teaching as experienced by public elementary school teachers, which served as the foundation for conducting

this qualitative research. Damalerio et al. (2024) underscored that exploring teachers lived experiences offered meaningful insights into the underlying motivations and cultural dynamics that shaped how they responded to instructional challenges. Using phenomenological research, this study aimed to address that need by delving into the multi-grade teaching experiences of public elementary school educators. Tavakol and Sanders (2025) also highlighted that phenomenological inquiry in educational contexts particularly in teacher and medical education—should be firmly rooted in real-life experiences. One foundational belief of this approach was that lived experience constituted a credible and insightful source of knowledge. Contrary to the notion that individual experiences are subjective and unreliable, phenomenology positioned them as

essential to understanding human behavior and meaning-making. Pawson and Rowland (2025) supported the use of methods such as in-depth interviews and lifeworld-oriented analysis to capture the depth and complexity of everyday educational experiences, asserting that such approaches provide a valid basis for qualitative understanding. Moreover, Bantugan (2025) emphasized the necessity of adopting a qualitative perspective to fully grasp and interpret the nuanced meanings embedded in individual narratives. Based on this framework, the present study explored the experiences of public-school teachers handling multi-grade classes, with the aim of generating insights that could inform future research and contribute to evidence-based educational policy development.

2.3. Design and Procedure—This study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of individuals by examining how they perceived and interpreted specific situations. Within the context of human experience, this methodology typically involved collecting rich, in-depth data through inductive and qualitative techniques, including interviews, discussions, and participant observations. These data represented from the viewpoint of the participants themselves. The core focus of phenomenology lay in understanding individual experiences while consciously setting aside pre-existing assumptions and habitual ways of thinking. From an epistemological perspective, phenomenology operated within a paradigm that emphasized subjective knowledge and personal interpretation. It proved particularly effective in uncovering internal motivations, personal meanings, and nuanced understandings, enabling researchers to move beyond

common assumptions and generalized beliefs. This approach was inherently aligned with qualitative research traditions, as it recognized that individuals' perceptions shaped their responses and behaviors in contextually meaningful ways. The intent of utilizing this approach was to shed light on phenomena through the perspectives of those directly involved. For instance, Bahrami et al. (2023) applied semi-structured interviews and a constructivist grounded theory to investigate how mentoring supported women in managing work-life demands. Like their approach, this research relied on qualitative methods to explore the work-life dynamics and professional realities of teachers managing multi-grade classrooms. Phenomenology provided a fitting framework for this inquiry, allowing the researcher to capture authentic narratives, interpret individual experiences, and gain insight into the challenges and opportunities these teachers encountered in their educational contexts.

2.4. Research Participants—

In qualitative research, smaller sample sizes are typically required compared to quantitative studies. However, the sample should be large enough to capture a broad range of perceptions, enabling the researcher to reach saturation. Saturation is achieved when additional participants no longer contribute new insights or perspectives. This concept is widely recommended as a guiding principle for determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative studies. For phenomenological research, Creswell (2020) suggests a sample size ranging from five to twenty-five participants. Nevertheless, there are no fixed rules in qualitative research regarding sample size; it is often shaped by the scope of the study, available resources, and time constraints. This study employed purposive sampling to select its participants. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental or selective sampling, is a non-probability method where participants are intentionally chosen based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. For this study, ten public elementary school teachers were selected for in-depth interviews, and three others participated in a focus

group discussion (FGD). All participants were from Marilog B District, Davao City Division. The inclusion criteria required that participants be permanent public elementary school teachers within the district and have at least three years of teaching experience in the public school system. The choice of purposive sampling was deliberate and aligned with the study's intent to gather authentic and in-depth data. By selecting individuals who possess substantial experience and insight into the research topic, the study was able to uncover richer and more meaningful narratives. This method enabled the researcher to focus on participants whose lived experiences could reveal valuable themes and patterns not attainable through random sampling. Guided by Creswell (2020), this approach ensured that the participants' voices genuinely reflected the context and essence of the phenomenon under investigation. The depth and relevance of the data collected significantly contributed to the credibility of the findings. Ultimately, this sampling strategy allowed the study to remain focused, purposeful, and grounded in real-life educational experiences.

2.5. Ethical Considerations—Ethical considerations played a crucial role in the design and implementation of this research study. The researcher carefully addressed various ethical concerns related to the participants involved in the fieldwork. Upholding ethical standards recognized as a fundamental aspect of the research process. Throughout the study, the researcher ensured adherence to principles that promote the integrity of the research, including the pursuit of truthful findings, the dissemination of authentic knowledge, and the avoidance of bias or error. These ethical commitments were essential in safeguarding the rights, dignity, and confidentiality of all participants and in maintaining the credibility of the research outcomes.

Social Value

Research played a vital role in contributing to societal development. In this study, the social value centered on the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers. The investigation specifically conducted among educators handling multi-grade classes, aiming to highlight their challenges and insights. The findings served as a potential foundation for higher authorities to develop targeted programs and policy interventions that could support and empower classroom teachers. The researcher's interest driven by a pressing social concern, the difficulties encountered by public school teachers in managing multi-grade instruction. These challenges included the scarcity of instructional materials, the absence of training tailored to multi-grade teaching strategies, and

the complexities of addressing the diverse needs of learners within a single classroom setting.

Informed Consent

McLeod (2024) emphasized that phenomenological research grounded in exploring individuals lived experiences, aiming to uncover underlying motivations and question preconceived notions. In this study, participants invited based on a clear understanding that their involvement was entirely voluntary and informed by sufficient background about the research. The recruitment procedures and selection criteria documented in the appendices of the study. Establishing trust and gaining the support of the participants were essential components in maintaining ethical standards and the integrity of phenomenological inquiry. Prior to the interviews, each participant received an informed consent form detailing the study's purpose, contact information, and their rights as contributors. Participants required to sign and return the consent form, indicating their agreement to participate in and understanding of the research goals. The informed consent process designed to introduce the nature of the study, request voluntary engagement, and outline the type of information expected from participants. This procedure ensured the protection of participants' rights, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the freedom to withdraw at any stage without consequences. Moreover, it promoted transparency and mutual respect between the researcher and the participants throughout the data collection process. . Vulnerability of Research Participants

The participants in this study were able to respond effectively to the research instrument, as they were all professional teachers employed in public elementary schools. To ensure open communication, the researcher provided clear contact details, including a phone number and address, so that participants could easily reach out for any clarifications or inquiries related to the study.

Risks, Benefits and Safety

The recruitment of respondents conducted without any form of coercion, undue influence, or inducement. Participants provided with the contact information of the panel chair or panel members to address any questions or concerns related to the study. In cases where participants might have experienced discomfort or inconvenience while responding to the instrument, they were under no obligation to continue or complete their participation. The researcher took deliberate measures to ensure the safety and well-being of all respondents during the administration of both the survey and interviews. To further support this, questionnaires distributed in secure, appropriate venues and scheduled at times convenient for the participants. A primary ethical focus of the study was the Treaty Principle of Protection, which demonstrated through commitment to upholding participants' privacy, confidentiality, and minimization of risk. To protect their identities, pseudonyms assigned to each informant. Moreover, potential risks mitigated by implementing all necessary precautions to maintain strict confidentiality throughout the research process.

Privacy and Confidentiality of Information

This research strictly adhered to the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 to safeguard the confidentiality of the participants and ensure that their identities remained untraceable (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012). All necessary precautions was taken to maintain the anonymity of data sources, and any printed or documented outputs related to the study were handled with discretion to protect personal information. The researcher also took careful measures to prevent any conflict of interest throughout the data collection process. Misrepresentation or biased interpretation of the findings consciously avoided. Prior to data gathering, participants was clearly informed about the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, and their own responsibilities as respondents.

They encouraged us to answer all survey questions with sincerity and were reminded that any communication concerning the research must be transparent and honest. Lastly, the participants made themselves aware that the primary beneficiaries of the study's outcomes would be themselves. Transparency

The results of the study were made accessible to the respondents and the heads of the participating schools, as the information stored on CDs or other digital storage devices, which could be requested directly from the researcher. By reviewing the findings, public elementary school teachers expected to gain insight into the study's relevance and its potential contribution to their professional and personal well-being. Moreover, participants informed of their right to withdraw their data at any point prior to the conclusion of the data collection phase. They given the opportunity to review and validate their individual interview transcripts; allowing them to revise or omit any content they believed could potentially reveal their identity. To further protect confidentiality, the researcher retained the discretion to use pseudonyms and modify names or non-essential dates in the presentation and analysis of the data.

Qualification of Researcher

Before undertaking the study, the researcher ensured she was fully qualified and prepared. She successfully completed all required academic courses and passed the comprehensive examination key prerequisites before beginning her thesis, the final component of her master's program. In addition to meeting academic requirements, the researcher assessed and affirmed her readiness across physical, mental, emotional, and financial aspects. The strong partnership between the researcher and her thesis adviser was instrumental to the study's success. Through ongoing collaboration, the adviser provided valuable guidance that maintained the academic depth and ethical integrity of the research, contributing to its overall credi-

bility and trustworthiness.

Adequacy of Facilities

The researcher exerted every effort to complete the study within the allotted timeframe, ensuring that all necessary resources were in place to support its implementation. Valuable insights and recommendations from the technical committee also contributed significantly to strengthening the quality of the research. Additionally, the researcher secured adequate financial support to sustain the study from start to finish. With these preparations firmly established, the study was expected to be completed within the targeted schedule.

Community Involvement

The researcher demonstrated deep respect for the local traditions, cultural practices, and perspectives of the participants involved in the study. No form of deception was employed at any stage of the research, particularly during participant recruitment or data collection. The researcher also expressed sincere appreciation for the genuine and willing participation of the interviewees. All responses were handled with the highest level of confidentiality and sensitivity, in recognition of the trust extended by the participants. Guided by humility and cultural awareness, the researcher conducted her presence in the community with care and respect. Throughout the entire research process, the dignity and well-being of all participants remained a top priority.

Plagiarism and Fabrication as the Researcher

The researcher upheld academic integrity by properly acknowledging the original authors of referenced works and by paraphrasing ideas using her own words. When directly quoting from other sources, appropriate quotation marks and citations were used to clearly indicate the origin of the text. The researcher also ensured that honesty and transparency guided the development of the manuscript. No data or results were fabricated or misrepresented, and all conclusions

were drawn truthfully based on accurate analysis and evidence.

2.6. Role of the Researcher—It is the researcher's duty to generate, apply, and share knowledge that contributes meaningfully to the improvement of educational institutions. In fulfilling this responsibility, the researcher assumes several key roles throughout the course of the study:

Facilitator and Advocate of Objective Inquiry. The researcher facilitates interviews by providing clear guidance to participants throughout the process. In analyzing the data, the researcher interprets participants' responses considering established literature and relevant studies, rather than relying on personal beliefs or assumptions. This approach helps ensure that the findings remain impartial and free from personal bias.

Practitioner of Qualitative Research Expertise. The researcher demonstrates proper application of qualitative research methods by engaging in self-assessment and seeking guidance from the research adviser and other experienced scholars. This collaborative approach ensures the researcher's competence in presenting the study objectively, conducting interviews in alignment with the research design, and making accurate field observations. Furthermore, the researcher carefully selects relevant artifacts, images, and journal excerpts, and applies Environmental Triangulation and Thematic Content Analysis with precision and integrity.

Collector and Keeper of Data. The researcher takes deliberate steps to document all interactions during interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) through handwritten notes,

and audio or video recordings. These recordings are transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy before proceeding with data analysis. As these records may contain sensitive and personal information, they are stored securely and treated with the utmost confidentiality. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher holds the primary responsibility of protecting both the participants and their information. Clear protocols for data safeguarding are communicated to all participants and are subject to prior approval by an accredited research ethics review board to ensure ethical compliance.

Interpreter of Participant Realities. As a data analyst, the researcher seeks to understand the phenomenon through the lens of the participants, ensuring that their perspectives guide the interpretation of data. This involves careful transcription, verification, deep reading, coding, and theming of responses. The researcher remains committed to accurately representing the participants' voices, ensuring that the findings genuinely reflect their experiences and insights.

Organizer and Presenter of Data. The researcher systematically presents the research problem alongside relevant literature and related studies that provide context and support. Study findings are organized and presented according to the research questions, with each question addressed through thematic analysis to clearly demonstrate how the data responds to the inquiry. Additionally, the researcher offers insights on the study's implications and suggests future directions to inform and enhance educational policies and practices.

2.7. Data Collection—The following outlines the step-by-step process used to gather the necessary data for the study.

Securing Endorsement from the Dean of the

Graduate School

The researcher sought an endorsement letter from the Dean of the Graduate School of Rizal Memorial Colleges. This endorsement

served as one of the required documents for submission to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent when requesting permission to conduct the study. The request included a brief overview of the research purpose, methodology, and target participants. The endorsement confirmed the academic validity of the study and the researcher's affiliation with the institution.

Asking Permission from the Schools Division Superintendent

Prior to the conduct of the study, the researcher formally sought the approval of the Schools Division Superintendent. A letter of request was submitted, accompanied by the first two chapters of the research and the research instrument. These documents outlined the purpose of the study and provided details regarding the target participants. The researcher will proceed with the implementation of the study only upon receiving written authorization from the Schools Division Superintendent.

Asking Permission from the School Heads

Following the approval from the Schools Division Superintendent, the researcher reached out to the principals of the identified schools through formal letters. These communications provided a clear explanation of the study's purpose, scope, and anticipated outcomes. The letters also highlighted that participation in the research would be entirely voluntary and that strict confidentiality would be maintained throughout the process. To promote transparency and foster collaboration, the principals were encouraged to seek clarification or raise any concerns regarding the conduct of the study. The researcher ensured that all procedures respected the rights and welfare of the participants at all times. .

Obtaining Consent from the Participants

In February 2024, the researcher sought the consent of the participants to take part in the study. A formal orientation was conducted to inform them about the nature of the research and the procedures involved in their participation.

The purpose of the study was clearly communicated to ensure a full understanding of their role in the research. Participants were assured that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point without facing any negative consequences. They were also given sufficient time to ask questions and seek clarification before signing the informed consent form. All ethical considerations were observed to uphold the dignity and autonomy of each participant throughout the study.

Conducting the Interview

In February 2024, the researcher carried out in-depth interviews using a structured interview questionnaire. Participants' profiles were documented, and notes were taken during the sessions. To facilitate accurate transcription, conversations were recorded using a sound recorder. Throughout the interviews, the researcher listened attentively and responded thoughtfully, ensuring that a respectful and comfortable atmosphere was maintained to encourage open and honest sharing. Follow-up questions were posed to clarify responses and explore deeper insights. Additionally, non-verbal cues were carefully observed to enhance the interpretation and contextual understanding of the data.

Transcribing the Responses of the Interviewees

The researcher transcribed the interview responses with accuracy by carefully reviewing the audio recordings. When participants expressed their answers in their vernacular language, the researcher translated the content into English while preserving the original meaning and context of their statements. This process ensured both fidelity to the participants' voices and clarity for analysis.

Data Coding and Thematic Content Analysis

Following the transcription process, the researcher categorized and coded the data to identify emerging themes. Responses from individual participants were compared to recognize

similarities, differences, and meaningful patterns. To validate and enrich the initial findings, a second round of interviews was conducted through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), allowing participants to clarify or expand on their earlier responses. The additional insights gath-

ered were carefully examined and integrated into the existing data set. This process enabled the researcher to identify consistent patterns and trends that supported a deeper understanding of the study's objectives.

2.8. Data Analysis—This study employed thematic analysis to interpret the collected data. The researcher utilized Creswell's (2020) model, particularly the approach focused on identifying themes, to guide the analytical process. In qualitative research, Creswell defines themes as clusters of similar codes that are grouped together to represent a central idea within the data. As a foundational step, the researcher immersed herself in the data to ensure a deep understanding of the participants' responses. This involved repeatedly reading the transcripts and making initial analytical notes. Familiarization with the data is essential in all forms of qualitative analysis, allowing the researcher to develop insights and identify recurring patterns that would later form the basis of the study's key themes.

Coding

A common element across many qualitative analysis approaches is the generation of concise, meaningful labels or codes that highlight significant features of the data relevant to the overarching research question. In this study, coding was not merely a technique for data reduction, but a vital analytical process that involved interpreting both the explicit (semantic) and underlying (conceptual) meanings within the responses. The researcher systematically coded every data item, ensuring that important details were captured accurately. This phase concluded with the careful collation of all codes and their corresponding data extracts, laying the groundwork for theme development.

Searching for Themes

From the coded data, coherent and meaning-

ful patterns emerged, revealing common ideas and experiences that addressed the study's research questions. The researcher systematically organized the codes into categories that represent shared realities among the participants. To ensure the accuracy and depth of analysis, the constant comparison method was employed continually examining similarities and differences across responses. This phase concluded with the collation of all coded data under each identified theme, each supported by direct participant responses and aligned with the overall objectives of the study.

Reviewing Theme

The researcher engaged in critical reflection to assess whether the emerging themes conveyed a convincing and coherent narrative based on the data. Each theme was then carefully defined, focusing on its core meaning and its relationship to other themes. To guide this process, Thematic Content Analysis was employed. This method involves the descriptive presentation of qualitative data, where each theme is thoroughly examined to identify its essence and is assigned a clear, concise, and meaningful label (Creswell, 2020). To enhance the validity of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, the researcher also employed Environmental Triangulation. This technique involves analyzing the study results using different environmental conditions or settings to identify factors that may influence the data collected (David, 2015). By intentionally varying contextual elements such as time, location, and environmental conditions (e.g., day, season), the researcher was able to

determine whether these factors impacted the consistency of the responses. If the findings remained stable despite these variations, the validity of the study was strengthened (Naeem Saira, 2019). In the context of this research, Environmental Triangulation was deemed appropriate, as it aligned well with the nature of the study and the dynamics of the research environment.

Writing-up

This stage of the research involved integrating the analytical narrative with relevant data extracts to present a coherent and compelling account of the findings. The goal was to tell a persuasive story that not only reflects the par-

ticipants' voices but also situates the insights within the context of existing literature. Careful reflection was required to ensure that the themes were not only clearly communicated but also deeply interpreted in alignment with the study's theoretical framework. At this point, the researcher aimed to balance analytical rigor with narrative clarity, combining interpretation and evidence to give meaning to the data. Writing the final report demanded both precision and storytelling skill to ensure that the research findings were thoughtfully conveyed and richly contextualized.

2.9. Framework of Analysis—This study employed Framework Analysis due to its flexibility and systematic approach, allowing the researcher to either collect all the data before beginning the analysis or engage in analysis concurrently with data collection. During the analysis phase, the data were sifted, charted, and sorted according to key issues and emerging themes. This process followed the five-step model of Framework Analysis: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpretation. A recent advancement in this method is reflected in the work of Flanders, Nungsari, and Loong (2025), who enhanced the original approach by integrating artificial intelligence (AI) to aid in identifying rich and meaningful data for qualitative exploration. Their AI-assisted model upheld the iterative and human-centered foundation of Ritchie and Spencer's framework while improving efficiency in analyzing large or complex qualitative datasets. This innovation affirms the continued relevance of Framework Analysis in modern research contexts. The initial phase, familiarization, involved deep engagement with the data through repeated readings of transcripts, margin coding, reflective memoranda, and team discussions. This ap-

proach aligns with the critical realist adaptation described by Mercier et al. (2023), which emphasizes staying "close to the raw data" while also exploring deeper social mechanisms. The researcher became immersed in the data by listening to audio recordings, reading field notes, and reviewing transcripts. This immersion led to the identification of recurring ideas and early thematic patterns. Due to the volume of qualitative data, a purposeful selection was made based on methodological considerations, such as the variety of data sources interviews, documents, and observations. The second step, identifying a thematic framework, took place once the researcher had become familiar with the data. Emerging themes were identified, which could be informed either by prior concepts or issues that surfaced during the initial reading. However, the emphasis was on allowing the data to guide the development of themes. Notes from the familiarization phase played a key role in constructing this framework. Mercier, Sanders, and Munford (2023) situate Framework Analysis within a critical realist paradigm, highlighting the importance of understanding participant narratives while recognizing the structural conditions that shape those experiences. This conceptual grounding guided the present study's

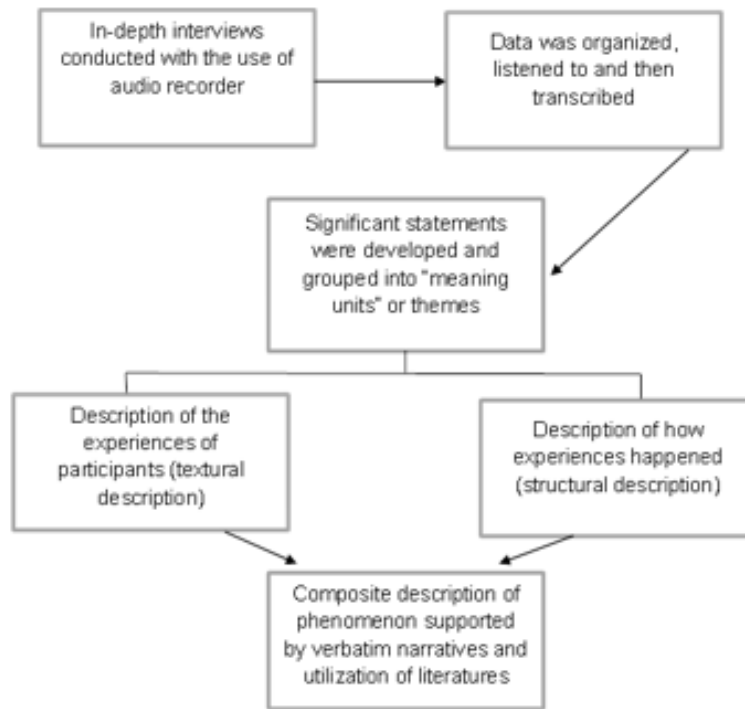


Fig. 2. Analytical Framework of the Study

analytical process, where themes were developed through an iterative examination of participant responses and contextual influences. The third stage, indexing, involved systematically applying codes to segments of data that corresponded to identified themes. This process was applied across all textual data, primarily interview transcripts. In this regard, Katz, Fleming, and Main (2024) introduced GATOS, an AI-assisted coding system that integrates generative AI and machine learning to streamline the development of thematic codebooks. While improving the speed and organization of initial coding, the researcher's interpretive role remained central, ensuring depth and rigor were preserved demonstrating how the foundational indexing practices of Ritchie and Spencer have evolved with technological innovations. Charting, the fourth step, involved rearranging the data according to the thematic framework, enabling

the researcher to view the information clearly across participants and themes. This visual organization helped reveal relationships and inconsistencies in the data and allowed for cross-case comparisons. Finally, the mapping and interpretation phase entailed analyzing the charted data to identify key characteristics, associations, and underlying patterns. This interpretative work provided a conceptual map of the studied phenomenon, guided by the study's objectives. The goals of qualitative analysis at this stage defining concepts, mapping the range and nature of experiences, identifying typologies, uncovering relationships, and developing informed explanations were achieved by grounding interpretations in participant narratives. The insights drawn and any recommendations made were thus reflective of the authentic attitudes, values, and lived experiences of the participants.

2.10. Trustworthiness of the Study—

Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves ensuring credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability throughout the study. These elements are essential in demonstrating the rigor and integrity of the research process. Given the subjective and interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry, the reliability of the findings greatly depends on how the study is designed, conducted, and analyzed. Upholding truthfulness, transparency, and ethical responsibility in handling data is fundamental. Trustworthiness not only affirms the value of the research but also makes it meaningful, sharing, and a source of scholarly pride.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence in the accuracy and truthfulness of findings within qualitative research. In this study, the researcher emphasized that honesty and integrity are essential to producing meaningful and trustworthy results. The researcher maintains a clean professional record, free from any administrative or ethical violations, further reinforcing the credibility of the work. Expanding on this, Tariq (2025) affirmed that credibility remains a core pillar of qualitative research. He outlined strategies such as prolonged engagement, member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail as essential to ensuring the authenticity and reliability of findings. These practices build upon the updated interpretations of Guba's framework, as discussed by Ali and Kumar (2022), who highlighted the ongoing relevance of reflexivity, ethical transparency, and systematic documentation in establishing credibility in contemporary qualitative studies.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied to other contexts such as similar settings, populations, or phenomena. In this research, the focus on multi-grade class teaching addresses a critical area in basic education, where the quality and accessibility of instruction must be

ensured despite structural and resource-related challenges. The perspectives of public elementary school teachers offer valuable insights into the realities of this teaching approach. By providing rich, detailed descriptions of the research setting and participants, the study allows readers to assess the relevance and applicability of the findings to their own contexts. Recent literature, such as Ahmad and Velasco (2022), reaffirms that transferability is achieved not through statistical generalization but through contextual resonance, enabling readers to determine whether the findings are meaningful in their own educational settings. This builds upon Gasson's earlier emphasis on transferability as the reader's ability to draw generalizations based on contextual similarities. By grounding the findings in detailed narratives, the study empowers future researchers and practitioners to draw parallels and consider implications within their own educational landscapes.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the participants' input rather than the researcher's personal biases, assumptions, or interests. It ensures that interpretations remain grounded in the data collected and not influenced by subjective perspectives. To uphold this principle, the researcher must maintain objectivity throughout the analytical process, carefully documenting decisions and procedures. One effective strategy is the use of an audit trail a detailed, chronological account of all steps taken during data analysis. This transparent record allows others to trace the origins of interpretations and verify that conclusions are firmly rooted in participants' actual responses. According to Weng (2024), the credibility of qualitative research is significantly strengthened when an audit trail is supported by reflexive journaling and participant validation, as it provides evidence that findings emerged directly from the data rather than being guided by researcher intent.

Dependability

refers to the degree to which a research study can be replicated by other researchers and yield consistent results. Essentially, a study should be documented thoroughly enough for others to repeat the process and arrive at similar conclusions. To ensure this, qualitative researchers often employ an inquiry audit, where an independent reviewer examines the research methodology and data analysis procedures to confirm that the findings are stable and repeatable. Maintaining a well-organized database is

critical in this context, as it preserves detailed records of all data collected, methodological decisions, and any modifications made throughout the study. These records not only support the credibility of the research but also serve as a reference for future investigations. As noted by Nowell et al. (2021), establishing dependability involves clear documentation of the research design and process, allowing for transparency and consistency across time, researchers, and analytic strategies.

3. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents and interprets the findings of the study in relation to its primary objective. It offers an in-depth discussion of the emerging themes identified from the data gathered through participant interviews. To uphold ethical standards and protect participant anonymity, everyone is represented by a pseudonym. An overview of the participants' backgrounds is also provided to give context to their responses. The insights shared in this chapter illuminate the recurring patterns, lived experiences, and viewpoints that surfaced throughout the data collection process.

3.1. Lived Experiences of Teachers in Teaching Multi-Grade—The growing presence of multi-grade classrooms, particularly in remote and marginalized communities, highlights the need to closely examine the real-life experiences of educators who manage multiple grade levels at once. These teachers encounter distinct instructional challenges, including accommodating varied learning abilities, crafting adaptable lesson plans, and providing balanced attention to all students despite limited time and resources. Gaining insight into their day-to-day realities can reveal the methods they use, the kinds of support they need, and the professional insights they develop through this complex teaching arrangement. Such understanding may inform future educational poli-

cies and guide the creation of more relevant and responsive teacher training initiatives. In addition, delving into the lived experiences of multi-grade teachers enriches the conversation around inclusive and responsive education. It brings attention to the perseverance and ingenuity of educators who often work alone and with scarce institutional backing. Capturing and reflecting on their stories allows decision-makers to better understand the practical demands of multi-grade teaching, identify shortcomings in curricular support, resource distribution, and teacher development, and promote more responsive interventions. In the long run, these findings may help shape practices that improve both student learning and teacher well-being in multi-grade environments.

3.1.1. Role Expansion as Instructional Innovators—Teachers in Philippine multi-grade settings often described becoming more creative and resourceful due to the demands of teaching

multiple levels. They go beyond traditional instruction by designing learner-centered, flexible lesson plans suitable for different ages and abilities. Many highlighted that being in such

settings forced them to “think outside the box” and develop non-traditional teaching techniques. This innovation comes from necessity due to a lack of grade-specific textbooks and materials. This theme is grounded in the lived reality that multi-grade teachers must innovate daily to meet their learners’ diverse needs. Because the Department of Education often supplies limited resources, these teachers become natural curriculum developers and problem-solvers. This fosters a distinct kind of professional growth grounded in ingenuity. Their experience suggests that multi-grade teaching, while demanding, builds versatile and highly adaptive educators. Kalender and Erdem (2021) explain that multi-grade teaching significantly broadens a teacher’s role, requiring them to man-

3.1.2. Emotional Resilience and Professional Fulfillment—Despite the heavy responsibilities, teachers reflected on a sense of fulfillment and joy in seeing learners progress in such complex settings. Many shared stories of overcoming fear and frustration through patience, experience, and deep dedication to students. Some admitted that the experience initially overwhelmed them, but over time, it strengthened their passion for teaching. Teachers also mentioned feeling proud of helping underserved communities despite being under-supported themselves. The emotional resilience developed in these classrooms is a hallmark of the multi-grade teaching experience in the Philippines. Teachers must balance instructional tasks with emotional labor, often in isolated, rural barangay schools. Their ability to persist and grow under pressure highlights a deep commitment to public service. This theme emphasizes how personal values and profes-

3.1.3. Contextualized Teaching Practice—Teachers reported that their work naturally extended beyond the classroom, involving them in the life of the community. They engage with

age different levels while promoting collaboration—reflecting how Marilog B teachers design flexible lessons and learning stations. Akdaş and Kalman (2021) also noted that rural teachers often lack resources and support but adapt creatively, just as P2 shared. Similarly, Kuru and Tosun (2022) found many teachers feel unprepared, particularly in subject-specific or digital areas, yet teachers like P2 learn to manage through experience. Tastan and Bezci (2023) highlighted the challenge of mixed-age learners, which teachers like P3 and P6 address through peer learning and student leadership. Collectively, these studies affirm that while multi-grade teaching is complex, it builds resilience, innovation, and strong dedication traits clearly demonstrated by teachers in Marilog B.

sional mission evolve within such roles. The study by Khanal (2022) emphasizes that multi-grade classrooms not only enhance educational experiences for students but also contribute to the professional development of teachers by cultivating patience, adaptability, and emotional resilience. Teachers in this research expressed how their initial challenges gradually transformed into sources of fulfillment and pride. As Khanal notes, the dynamic and layered nature of teaching in a blended environment promotes personal growth, reinforcing the transformative impact of teaching under adversity. Despite the challenges, many multi-grade teachers find joy and pride in their work. Studies by Bagay (2025), Fabrigas and Paglinawan (2025), and Villa and Valle (2025) show that teachers grow more resilient and fulfilled as they adapt, help underserved learners, and gain confidence through experience. Their struggles often lead to deeper commitment and purpose in teaching.

parents not just during PTA meetings but in everyday matters affecting learners’ attendance, nutrition, and welfare. Older pupils are often relied upon to assist younger ones, creating a

community of learners' models. These teachers become not only educators but also counselors, organizers, and advocates. In rural multi-grade settings, the community becomes a co-teacher and support system. Teachers form strong ties with stakeholders to overcome limited resources and promote student success. These interactions reflect a form of socially embedded pedagogy. This theme highlights the multi-functional role of a teacher in marginalized educational contexts. Engin (2018) highlights that in multi-grade teaching, educators often operate within a rural context that shapes the entire instructional environment from curriculum delivery to student engagement and material usage. This aligns with the study's finding that teachers acted not only as instructors but also as community liaisons and advocates. Their instruction was deeply influenced by the socio-cultural realities of their learners, validating Engin's assertion that effective teaching in multi-grade contexts is deeply embedded in local culture and community engagement. Mbiti, Mango, and Stein (2022) found that rural teachers naturally apply differentiated instruction and pro-

mote peer support like P10 and P7's use of collaboration in class. Tomlinson (2017) emphasized the role of routines and engagement, echoing P11's strategy for maintaining learner focus. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023) also highlighted flexible planning and strong teacher-student connections, reflecting P12's approach to classroom and behavior management. Likewise, Benjamin and Panesar-Aguilar (2020) showed that shared planning among teachers boosts teaching quality in low-resource schools, aligning with P12's team efforts. These studies confirm the lived realities of Marilog B teachers, whose adaptability, creativity, and collaboration turn challenges into opportunities for growth and community-building. Based on the figure presented, three key themes emerged from the participants' responses: lived experiences of teachers in teaching multi-grade, issues and challenges they encounter, and insights and lessons learned that can be achieved in the study. These themes provided a structured lens through which the rich narratives of the participants were analyzed and interpreted.

3.2. Issues/Challenges they Encounter— Teachers handling multi-grade classes face significant instructional and time management challenges due to the need to address multiple curricula simultaneously. Participants commonly cited limited time to prepare differentiated lesson plans and difficulties in providing equal attention to all learners. These constraints often result in increased teacher workload, stress, and the risk of learner disengagement, especially when academic levels vary widely. Without proper support and structured guidance, teachers may struggle to balance the needs of each grade, leading to reduced instruc-

tional effectiveness. Additionally, classroom management emerges as a persistent issue, with educators noting that maintaining discipline and engagement across different age groups requires exceptional multitasking and adaptability. Limited access to teaching materials and inadequate professional training further compound these difficulties. Teachers often rely on self-developed strategies, such as peer learning and flexible grouping, to cope with the demands of their roles. These lived experiences underscore the need for systemic support, including policy revisions, tailored professional development, and improved resource allocation for multi-grade settings.

3.2.1. Overlapping Responsibilities and Time Deficiency—

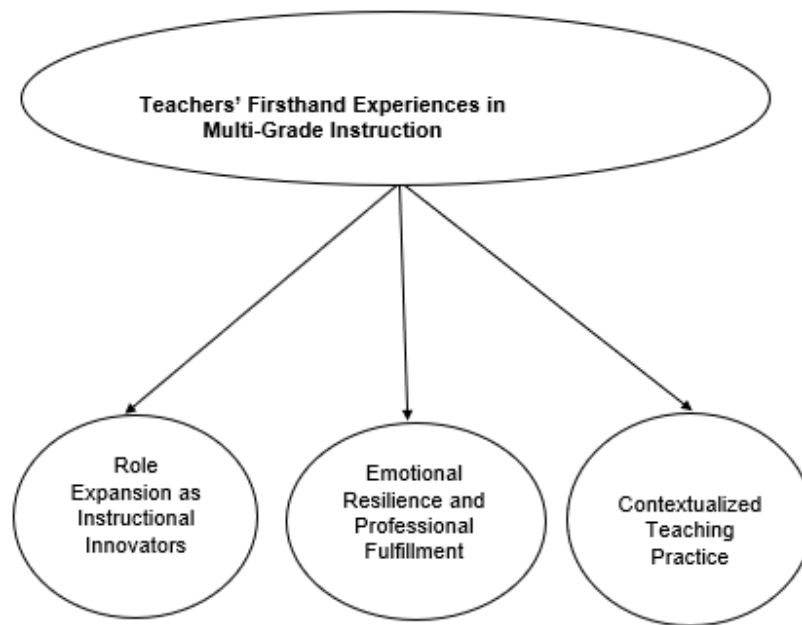


Fig. 3. Lived Experiences of Teachers in Teaching Multi-grade Issues/Challenges They Encounter

One common struggle voiced by teachers was the pressure of having to prepare multiple lessons daily while still managing the classroom. Planning for multiple grade levels with little time and scant materials creates constant exhaustion. Many expressed difficulties in meeting learners' needs equitably. There is rarely time left for self-development or rest. This theme arises from the contextual challenge where teachers often serve as lone faculty members in small schools. The pressure of teaching different grades, often without grade-level teaching guides, limits their instructional efficiency. Their exhaustion is not only physical but cognitive and emotional. This issue reveals a systemic shortfall in personnel allocation and workload management. Vasquez-Martinez et al. (2021) point out that despite national efforts to improve multi-grade implementation, teachers still face considerable challenges due to overlapping responsibilities and inadequate preparation time. This study confirms that multi-grade teachers juggle multiple curricula with minimal planning time, often leading to ex-

haustion and reduced instructional quality. The alignment between this literature and participant feedback highlights a gap between policy intention and ground-level implementation. In rural Kenya, Mbiti, Mango, and Stein (2022) found that teachers struggled to prepare lessons for multiple grade levels due to time and material shortages, often relying on peer-assisted learning—similar to practices shared by participants in Marilog B. A 2024 *Frontiers in Education* report echoed these concerns globally, revealing how multi-grade teachers face severe time constraints, with workloads spilling into personal time, leading to burnout. Naparan and Alinsug (2021) highlighted the same challenges in Southeast Asia, noting that isolation, limited resources, and heavy workloads leave little room for self-care or professional growth. In the Philippines, Lagawid (2024) described this condition as “time poverty,” where teachers are overwhelmed by their daily responsibilities—from lesson planning to administrative tasks. Even in Switzerland, a 2022 study reported similar stressors among teachers, show-

ing that excessive duties and extended work hours lead to emotional and physical exhaustion. These studies affirm the lived realities of Marilog B teachers: multi-grade teaching demands much more than classroom instruction—it re-

quires balancing a heavy, unsupported workload that often leads to fatigue and burnout. Their experiences call for urgent, tailored support in time management and staffing for remote educator

3.2.2. Learner Engagement and Classroom Control—Teachers found it challenging to maintain the interest of learners across age groups, especially when using a single teaching strategy. Younger pupils might become distracted when instruction is aimed at older students, and vice versa. Teachers shared that they had to constantly innovate to prevent classroom disorder. Behavior management consumes a significant amount of teaching time. This difficulty is especially pronounced in multi-grade classes where learners have diverse maturity levels and learning capacities. In many remote schools, class sizes vary unpredictably, making group control harder. The lack of structured classroom support, like teaching assistants or SPED-trained co-faculty, further complicates this. This theme demonstrates how behavioral dynamics affect instructional flow in a multi-grade setup. Kalender and Erdem (2021)

highlight how multi-grade teaching broadens a teacher's role, requiring them to manage varied grade levels and foster collaboration echoing how teachers in this study design flexible lessons and group activities. Akdaş and Kalman (2021) add that rural teachers often face limited resources and parental involvement, yet respond with creativity and resilience, much like P2's self-taught approach. Similarly, Kuru and Tosun (2022) found that teachers feel unprepared for multi-grade settings, especially in subject-specific or digital areas—an experience P2 overcame through practice. Tastan and Bezci (2023) noted challenges in handling mixed-age learners, which teachers address by encouraging peer mentoring, as seen in P3 and P6. Collectively, these studies affirm that while multi-grade teaching is challenging, it cultivates resourcefulness, adaptability, and deep dedication—traits clearly seen among teachers in Marilog B District.

3.2.3. Infrastructural and Instructional Material Gaps—Several teachers pointed out the lack of textbooks, modules, and visual aids tailored for multi-grade contexts. They often resorted to improvising materials or downloading content using their own devices and mobile data. This material gap not only delays lesson delivery but also affects assessment and remediation. Teachers must constantly 'fill in the blanks' where the system fails. This is a grounded reality in the Philippines, where multi-grade classes are more common in geographically isolated schools. The lack of government-provided resources puts a heavier burden on teachers to be curriculum designers. In some cases, personal

funds are used to photocopy or create resources. This theme emphasizes structural inequality and the urgent need for targeted resource support. Akdas and Kalman (2021) highlight the scarcity of educational resources in multi-grade classrooms, particularly in geographically challenged areas. This is supported by the findings in this study, where participants repeatedly cited the lack of textbooks, visual aids, and grade-specific lesson plans as critical barriers to effective instruction. Their experiences reflect Akdas and Kalman's assertion that such deficiencies hinder both learner engagement and teacher efficiency. Chan, Marasigan, and Santander (2021) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Fil-

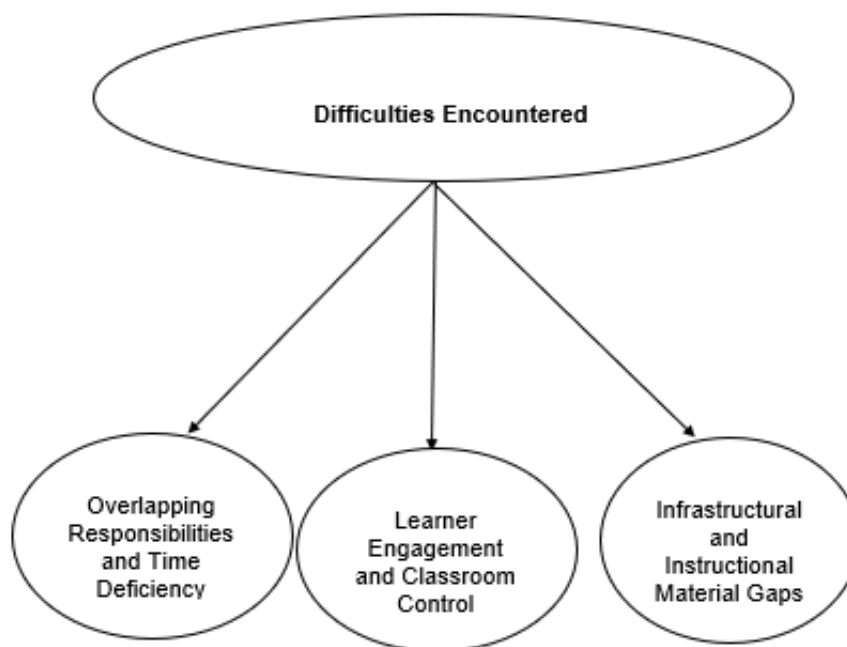


Fig. 4. Issues/Challenges they Encounter

ipino multi-grade teachers faced major setbacks like poor-quality modules, delayed distribution, and technical issues—often relying on personal resources and creativity to continue teaching, just as P2 and P3 did. Similarly, Bruce, Zafar, and Levin (2025) showed that inadequate school

materials—such as missing textbooks and limited visual aids—negatively affected students’ literacy, echoing participants’ concerns about how resource gaps hinder lesson delivery and assessment.

3.3. Insights and Lessons Learned that can be Achieved in the Study—The study reveals that one key insight gained from teaching multi-grade classes is the importance of differentiated instruction and flexible lesson planning. Teachers have learned to adjust their strategies to suit the varying needs, abilities, and learning styles of their learners, fostering creativity and adaptability in their teaching approach. Despite the limited resources, they discovered ways to maximize what is available by designing learner-centered and activity-based instruction. These insights emphasize the value of teacher innovation and responsiveness in managing complex

classroom dynamics. Another significant lesson learned is the development of time management and prioritization skills, which are crucial in juggling multiple responsibilities in a multi-grade setting. Teachers recognize the importance of collaboration, peer support, and continuous learning to cope with the instructional and behavioral challenges they face. They also realize the need for stronger institutional backing and context-specific training to enhance their teaching practice. Ultimately, the study highlights the resilience of multi-grade teachers and the critical need to support and empower them through appropriate policies and interventions.

3.3.1. Mastery in Multi-Level Lesson Integration—

Many teachers expressed pride in their growing ability to create lesson plans that simultaneously cater to different grade levels. They described learning to combine competencies, structure learning stations, or rotate group activities effectively. Over time, they become experts in scaffolding lessons across multiple content levels. This skill, though complex, became second nature through practice. In the context of Philippine multi-grade schools, this mastery is both a survival skill and a hallmark of advanced pedagogy. Teachers learn to develop spiral and thematic lessons that address key learning areas across levels. This insight elevates their instructional capacity and could inform teacher training modules. It also suggests multi-grade teaching can serve as professional acceleration, not just burden. Thomas (2020)

3.3.2. Value of Learner Independence and Peer Mentorship—Teachers shared that they learned to empower older learners to help younger ones, resulting in a peer-mentoring dynamic. This practice promotes learner autonomy, reduces classroom dependence on the teacher, and fosters leadership. It also allows teachers to attend to other tasks without compromising student learning. Over time, students become more self-reliant and motivated. This insight is culturally aligned with the Filipino concept of *bayanihan*—shared responsibility and mutual help. The teacher becomes a facilitator, while the classroom transforms into a cooperative environment. This model, though born out of necessity, provides a holistic and community-based approach to education. It may be valuable for developing localized teaching strate-

3.3.3. Professional Growth through Struggles—Teachers noted that the challenges of multi-grade instruction ultimately contributed to their personal and professional

highlights that multi-grade teachers gradually build expertise in integrating lessons across age groups, improving their adaptability—a finding echoed by Marilog B teachers who gained confidence through thematic and rotation strategies. Similarly, Thephavongsa (2018) found that Lao-tian teachers improved multi-grade planning through “lesson study,” shifting from improvisation to structured, cross-level teaching. In the Philippines, Naparan and Alinsug (2021) observed teachers in Zamboanga del Sur using spiral curricula and activity stations, which became effective routines over time. Supporting this, Tañedo, Valera, and Lazaro (2024) found that spiral progression helped secondary teachers scaffold learning and adapt instruction fluidly mirroring the growth experienced by multi-grade educators in rural Philippine settings.

gies in national curricula. Kalender and Erdem (2021) highlight that peer teaching is a natural strength of multi-grade classrooms, fostering collaboration and learner autonomy echoing this study’s findings on student mentorship and shared responsibility. In Misamis Oriental, Lacre and Valle (2024) observed that cross-age tutoring benefits both older and younger students by reinforcing learning and minimizing disruptions. Similarly, Bagay (2025) found that multigrade teachers in Apayao promoted independence through peer tutoring and project-based learning, with teachers serving more as facilitators. Pangantihon and Tantiado (2024) also linked peer collaboration to increased engagement and emotional resilience, showing that peer-driven approaches support both academic and personal growth.

growth. They developed patience, flexibility, and a problem-solving mindset not typically homed in mono-grade settings. This strengthened their confidence, especially in handling

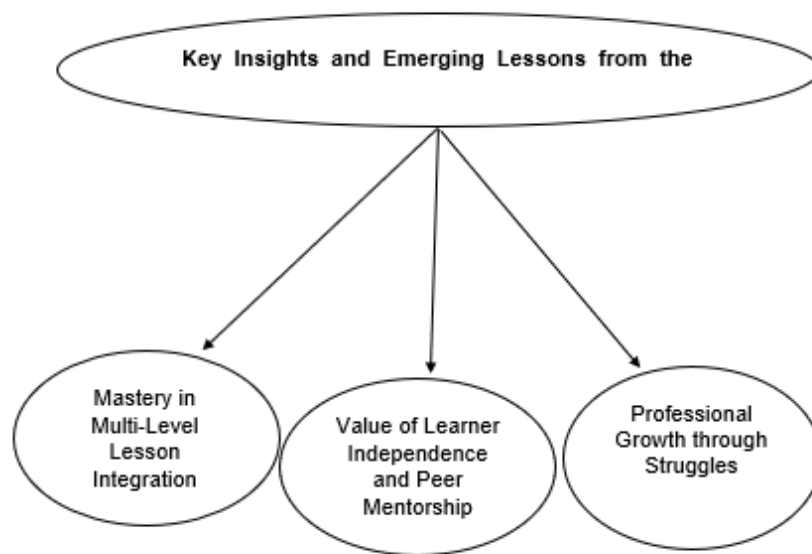


Fig. 5. Insights and Lessons Learned that can be Achieved in the Study

unexpected teaching scenarios. They came to view these experiences as formative. This theme is essential because it reframes adversity as an opportunity for transformation. While institutional support may be lacking, the personal evolution that teachers experience is undeniable. It signals the capacity of Filipino teachers to rise to challenges with grace and grit. These reflections could shape future policies to acknowledge and support this resilience. Khanal (2022) emphasized that teachers in multi-grade settings develop professionally through lived challenges, gaining skills like adaptability and leadership without formal training. This aligns with Marilog B teachers' accounts of becoming more resilient and confident through their struggles. Similarly, Bagay (2025) found that despite being overwhelmed, Apayao teachers grew more

resourceful and patient in response to multi-grade demands. During the pandemic, Chan, Marasigan, and Santander (2021) observed that Filipino teachers adapted creatively to remote modular teaching, mirroring participants' innovative responses. Likewise, Gumahob (2024) noted that resilience and professional confidence grow through flexible, responsive teaching, even without structured training—affirming that multi-grade teaching can be truly transformative. Based on the presented figure, three key themes emerged from the participants' responses regarding the educational values highlighted in the study: the strength of patience and consistency, the importance of shared educational responsibility, and the transformative power of learning and active engagement.

4. Implications and Future Directions

This chapter outlines the implications drawn from the shared experiences of teachers managing multi-grade classrooms. The study set out to examine the intricate realities of multi-grade instruction by delving into teachers' daily practices, the difficulties they encounter, and the insights they develop over time. Anchored in a qualitative phenomenological framework inspired by Creswell's (2020) approach, the research utilized open-ended interviews to gather personal,

detailed narratives. This method allowed participants to freely articulate their experiences, providing a genuine glimpse into the unique demands of their roles.

4.1. Findings—Through thematic analysis, three core themes emerged. The first theme emphasized how teachers adapt and grow demonstrating resilience, creativity in instruction, and the capacity to tailor lessons to learners with varied needs. The second theme focused on the pressing challenges they face, such as juggling multiple responsibilities, managing limited time, ensuring active learner participation, and working with inadequate teaching materials and infrastructure. These issues reveal the intense demands of multi-grade teaching and highlight the pressing need for institutional support. The third theme surfaced the mean-

ingful lessons teachers have drawn from their experiences, including the value of differentiated instruction, fostering learner autonomy and collaboration, and recognizing the professional growth that emerges through continuous adaptation. These findings point to the multifaceted nature of multi-grade teaching, underscoring the need for more inclusive policies, focused professional development, and practical support systems. By shedding light on the complex realities of these educators, this study calls on stakeholders to create environments that empower innovation, sustain teacher motivation, and prioritize well-being in multi-grade contexts.

4.2. Implications—The findings of this study indicate that teaching in multi-grade environments considerably expands the scope of educators' professional duties and expectations. These teachers are not confined to delivering instruction alone; they also take on the roles of curriculum planners, material creators, and strategic organizers. Due to the scarcity of instructional resources designed for multi-grade environments, teachers often rely on their creativity and initiative to develop flexible lessons that meet diverse learner needs. This reality underscores the importance of equipping future educators with a wide range of teaching skills, particularly those suited to complex, mixed-level contexts. Such adaptability aligns with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, where individuals like teachers continually adapt their mental frameworks to respond effectively to new and evolving circumstances in their teaching practice. In real classroom settings, no two days are ever the same, and this unpredictability demands both creativity and flexibility from educators. Teachers often learn to read the room, adjust on the fly, and make quick decisions that

benefit learners across different levels. These experiences shape not only their professional competence but also their personal growth as reflective practitioners. Over time, many teachers develop emotional strength and find fulfillment in their multi-grade roles, despite the initial stress and overwhelming demands. While frustration is common at the beginning, the long-term experience of overcoming these difficulties and witnessing students' growth brings a sense of professional pride. These findings suggest that the emotional labor involved in multi-grade teaching should not be overlooked. Instead, it must be supported through policies that acknowledge and respond to the unique emotional and professional demands of the role. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory supports this notion, emphasizing that professional learning is shaped not only by individual effort but also by the teacher's interactions with the cultural and social dynamics of their school communities. Another key point from the findings is how multi-grade teachers tailor their lessons to reflect the realities of their learners. Instruction often goes beyond standard curriculum content

to include themes rooted in local culture, language, and day-to-day life. This method not only increases the relevance of instruction but also fosters deeper student engagement. It embodies the core principles of place-based education and aligns with Vygotsky's theory, emphasizing the vital role of sociocultural context in shaping the learning experience. Consequently, curricular models should allow room for such contextualization and encourage community involvement, especially in rural or geographically remote schools. Managing time effectively surfaced as one of the most critical challenges encountered by teachers in multi-grade settings. The need to plan and deliver lessons across several grade levels places significant pressure on their ability to address individual learning needs. This fragmentation of time and attention reduces teaching efficiency and risks widening learning gaps. As such, there is a strong argument for revising workload and support policies to reflect the unique realities of multi-grade teaching. From Piaget's perspective, the absence of adequate time to differentiate instruction may limit teachers' ability to respond to learners' cognitive stages appropriately, further highlighting the necessity for support mechanisms that enable effective teaching. Behavior management and sustained learner engagement also appear as recurrent concerns. Balancing the needs of various grades in one classroom requires not only instructional expertise but also constant behavioral interventions. This suggests a lack of systemic support in terms of classroom management training and human resources. Incorporating teaching assistants or paraeducators into multi-grade classrooms could help address this gap. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development reinforces the idea that learners make meaningful progress when provided with guided support, whether from peers or adults. Lack of appropriate materials and infrastructure remains a serious constraint. Teachers often spend their own money or improvise

resources just to meet their students' learning needs. This points to deep-seated inequities in the way resources are distributed and suggests a need for more inclusive policies that directly address the logistical demands of remote and under-resourced schools. Unless these material gaps are resolved, teachers will continue to bear unnecessary burdens that can negatively impact their performance and well-being. Yet, despite these challenges, the study shows that multi-grade teachers often reach high levels of skill in lesson integration. Over time, they learn to plan and implement instructional activities that span different grade levels, ensuring that each learner meets the appropriate competencies. These findings indicate that multi-grade teaching, while difficult, can lead to advanced professional capabilities. Piaget's constructivist view supports this insight learning is an active, ongoing process where knowledge is built through direct experience and reflection. Additionally, peer learning stands out as a powerful dynamic in multi-grade classrooms. Older students often take on leadership roles, helping their younger classmates and contributing to a cooperative learning environment. This setup fosters social responsibility, empathy, and independence. Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction in learning is reflected here, where peer mentoring becomes a vital part of instructional delivery. It is, therefore, essential that education policies formally recognize and encourage structured peer learning in multi-grade models. Finally, the cumulative experience of multi-grade teachers points to the development of key professional traits adaptability, resourcefulness, and effective time management. These skills emerge not from formal training alone but from the demands of everyday teaching in multi-grade settings. As such, pre-service training programs should simulate these complex conditions and incorporate practical, problem-solving components. This echoes both Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories: that real growth occurs when individuals are

placed in authentic learning situations that require them to stretch, reflect, and respond in innovative ways.

4.3. Future Directions—Considering the study’s results, it is essential that the insights gained are clearly communicated and effectively utilized by the key individuals for whom this research was intended.

For the Department of Education (DepEd)

The Department of Education should prioritize the development of curriculum materials specifically designed for multi-grade classrooms. These resources should be adaptable, flexible, and aligned with the realities of rural and isolated schools. Additionally, DepEd must establish institutional policies that provide appropriate workload adjustments, teaching allowances, and mental health support for multi-grade teachers. Structured professional development programs focusing on differentiated instruction, contextualized teaching, and instructional resilience should be made mandatory and continuous. Most importantly, the department must allocate dedicated budgets for instructional materials, school infrastructure, and remote-school subsidies to bridge the glaring gaps that disadvantage both teachers and learners in these settings.

For School Principals and Administrators

School heads play a vital role in sustaining multi-grade education by serving as instructional leaders and emotional anchors. It is imperative that they implement scheduling systems that allow for collaborative lesson planning, peer mentoring among teachers, and protected time for assessment. They must also advocate for targeted school-based training sessions and external linkages with NGOs or LGUs to support resource provision. Equally important, principals should monitor teacher well-being, regularly conducting consultations or surveys that inform supportive administrative action. School heads must recognize multi-grade

educators not as liabilities but as adaptive leaders who require institutional trust, flexibility, and empowerment.

For Teachers

Teachers should be encouraged to establish communities of practice or peer-learning circles specifically tailored to multi-grade strategies. By sharing lesson plans, resources, and classroom strategies, teachers can reduce the burden of isolated planning. In-service training and certification pathways should be developed for multi-grade teachers to enhance their credentials and open up career advancement opportunities. Teachers must also be empowered to lead school-based action research to further contextualize and innovate their own practices. Lastly, mindfulness training and time-management workshops should be institutionalized to support their emotional and cognitive well-being.

For Learners

Learners in multi-grade settings benefit from instructional models that foster independence, cooperative learning, and leadership development. As such, classroom routines should intentionally include peer-teaching opportunities, self-check systems, and differentiated activity stations. Teachers and schools should design formative assessment tools that focus on individual growth rather than age-based grade expectations. Learner autonomy and responsibility should be built through project-based tasks and leadership roles, thus enhancing academic maturity and collaborative skills.

For Parents and Community Stakeholders

Parents and community members must be engaged as co-educators and resource providers in the multi-grade learning ecosystem. Regular workshops, parenting seminars, and school-community projects can build stronger ties and

shared responsibility. Barangay officials, elders, and community organizations should be tapped to provide learning opportunities or supplemental activities like reading corners, cultural storytelling, or gardening programs. Empowering parents to support homework routines or contribute local materials can significantly improve learner outcomes and lessen the burden on teachers.

For Future Researchers

Subsequent studies should explore the long-term academic and psychosocial outcomes of learners in multi-grade classrooms compared

to those in mono-grade settings. Researchers can also investigate how digital tools, and mobile technologies may bridge instructional gaps in isolated schools. A policy focused evaluation of DepEd's multi-grade programs and their on-the-ground effectiveness would provide valuable insights into implementation flaws and success stories. Lastly, phenomenological and ethnographic studies across different regions can broaden the understanding of how geography and culture uniquely shape multi-grade education in the Philippines.

5. References

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