

## **Multigrade teaching in Esperanza District: Teachers' accounts**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in the Esperanza District, focusing on instructional capabilities, lesson preparation, lesson delivery, classroom management, access to instructional resources, professional development opportunities, and appreciation of multigrade teaching. Using a phenomenological approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with ten multigrade teachers and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed major themes. First, teachers' instructional competence varied according to experience, with novice teachers initially struggling but gradually developing confidence, adaptability, and effectiveness through reflective practice. Second, lesson preparation was highly adaptive and context-driven, characterized by competency-based, learner-based, and resource-based planning, often constrained by limited instructional materials and heavy ancillary workloads. Third, lesson delivery was dominated by station teaching and rotational instruction, supported by peer mentoring, independent work, and adaptive strategies to address diverse learner needs. Fourth, classroom management relied on structured routines, clear expectations, task delegation to older learners, and learner-centered approaches that promote motivation, leadership, and well-being. Fifth, instructional resources were largely inadequate and not tailored for multigrade settings, compelling teachers to create, modify, borrow, or utilize local and digital materials. Sixth, professional development opportunities specific to multigrade teaching were limited, leading teachers to depend on self-directed, experiential, and collaborative learning. Finally, teachers' appreciation of multigrade teaching developed over time, shaped by professional growth, learner success, relationships, and, for some, acceptance rooted in livelihood. Overall, the study highlights the resilience, creativity, and adaptability of multigrade teachers and underscores the need for targeted training, adequate resources, and institutional support to strengthen multigrade teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** Multigrade teaching, lived experiences, instructional competence, lesson preparation and delivery, classroom management, instructional resources, professional development, qualitative research

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as the cornerstone of national progress, and education systems worldwide continue to pursue equitable learning opportunities for all learners. Despite this commitment, many countries face persistent difficulties in reaching children in remote and sparsely populated areas where traditional single grade schooling models are difficult to sustain. In response to these structural constraints, multigrade teaching, in which a single teacher handles two or more grade levels within one classroom, has become a practical and often necessary strategy in rural contexts (Jimenez, Pulvera Bunglay et al., 2025). Globally, multigrade classrooms address teacher shortages and limited school infrastructure while fostering peer learning, collaboration among learners of different ages and abilities, and inclusive practices when supported by adequate teacher training and instructional resources (Differentiated Instruction in Multigrade Classrooms, 2025).

In the Philippine context, multigrade teaching has long served as a crucial mechanism for extending educational access to underserved and geographically isolated communities. The Department of Education institutionalized support for multigrade classes through the Multigrade Program in Philippine Education under DepEd Order No. 38, s. 1993, and subsequently strengthened this support through DepEd Orders No. 81, s. 2009 and No. 24, s. 2020, which emphasized professional development and the provision of instructional resources. Despite these policy initiatives, multigrade teachers continue to encounter persistent challenges in lesson preparation, lesson delivery, and classroom management as a result of heavy workloads, limited instructional materials, and inadequate formal training (Pulvera Bunglay & Cutab, 2025 et al.). Teachers in multigrade settings must design lessons that accommodate multiple curricula, organize instruction to address diverse learning needs, and sustain engagement across different age groups, all while operating within constrained resource environments. The lack of instructional materials specifically suited for multilevel learning further intensifies planning and delivery demands (Jimenez, 2025; Differentiated Instruction in Multigrade Classrooms, 2025). In addition, limited access to professional development programs tailored to multigrade contexts compels teachers to rely on self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and reflective practice to cope with the complexities of their classrooms (Bagay, 2025).

In the Esperanza District of Agusan del Sur, multigrade teaching remains an integral component of the local educational landscape. Small and geographically dispersed schools with limited resources require teachers to assume demanding instructional responsibilities. These educators must deliver content across grade levels, manage diverse learner behaviors, collaborate with parents and community stakeholders, and creatively adapt to contextual challenges. However, there remains a need for a deeper understanding of how these teachers adapt their instructional practices and how their lived experiences can inform more responsive and effective support systems. This study addressed this gap by exploring the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in Esperanza District, with emphasis on their instructional practices, challenges, and innovative approaches. The insights generated from this inquiry served as the basis for the development of a Lesson Exemplar in Mathematics that reflects authentic strategies employed in multigrade settings, thereby contributing to improved teaching and learning practices in similar contexts.

The study was grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives that collectively provided a comprehensive lens for understanding multigrade instruction. The Differentiated Instruction Framework developed by Carol Ann Tomlinson in 2014 posits that learners differ in readiness, interests, and learning profiles, and therefore teachers must modify content, process, product, and learning environment to address these differences. In multigrade classrooms, where students from multiple grade levels are taught simultaneously,

differentiation is essential. Teachers design lessons that vary in complexity and depth to challenge advanced learners while providing scaffolded support for those requiring additional assistance. This framework is central to understanding how teachers' adaptive strategies shape learning outcomes and promote inclusivity in rural and resource constrained multigrade settings.

Self-Determination Theory proposed by Deci and Ryan in 2000 complements differentiated instruction by emphasizing the importance of intrinsic motivation in learning. According to this theory, learners are more engaged and effective when their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. In multigrade classrooms, teachers foster autonomy by offering choices and encouraging learners to take responsibility for aspects of their learning. They enhance competence by assigning appropriately challenging tasks aligned with students' abilities, thereby promoting success and confidence. Teachers also cultivate relatedness by encouraging collaboration among learners of different ages and abilities through strategies such as group rotations, peer mentoring, station teaching, and differentiated feedback. These approaches increase learner motivation and engagement, leading to active participation, persistence in problem solving, and achievement of learning objectives.

Self-Efficacy Theory formulated by Bandura in 1997 underscores the importance of individuals' beliefs in their capability to perform specific tasks. In multigrade contexts, teachers' self-efficacy directly influences their effectiveness in managing complex instructional demands across multiple grade levels. Teachers with strong self-efficacy demonstrate confidence in lesson design, strategy implementation, classroom behavior management, and creative use of limited resources. Student self-efficacy likewise plays a vital role in learning outcomes, as students who believe in their abilities are more likely to engage in challenging tasks, persist despite difficulties, and take initiative in learning activities. By fostering both teacher and student self-efficacy, multigrade classrooms become environments that empower learners to achieve meaningful progress despite diverse needs and material limitations. Teacher self-efficacy also supports willingness to experiment with innovative instructional strategies and engage in reflective practice, thereby promoting continuous professional growth in multigrade settings.

Taken together, the Differentiated Instruction Framework, Self-Determination Theory, and Self-Efficacy Theory provide a holistic understanding of multigrade teaching and learning. They emphasize learner-centered, inclusive, and adaptive practices while highlighting the interconnected roles of instructional strategies, learner motivation, and confidence in achieving positive educational outcomes. These frameworks guided the study in examining how multigrade teachers in Esperanza District prepared lessons, delivered instruction, managed classrooms, utilized instructional resources, and engaged in professional development. The integration of these perspectives also underscored the dynamic nature of multigrade teaching, as teachers combined differentiated instructional approaches with motivational strategies and efficacy-enhancing practices to create supportive and adaptive learning environments.

Guided by these theoretical foundations, the study developed a conceptual framework aimed at providing an in-depth understanding of the meaning and value of multigrade teachers' lived experiences in Esperanza District. The research paradigm identified input variables consisting of teachers' perceptions about multigrade teaching, their lived experiences, and their professional insights or views. These inputs informed a rigorous and systematic process of thematic analysis designed to identify, categorize, and interpret recurring patterns such as commonly encountered challenges, frequently employed instructional strategies, and shared perceptions of multigrade practice. This analytical approach enabled the study to move beyond

surface level descriptions and extract deeper insights into how teachers understood, managed, and adapted to the complexities of teaching multiple grade levels within a single classroom.

The themes generated through thematic analysis served as the foundation for the study's primary output, which was the development of a Lesson Exemplar in Mathematics. This exemplar was directly derived from the insights and effective practices articulated in teachers' narratives and integrated adaptive techniques and context responsive strategies identified as successful in multigrade settings. By grounding the lesson exemplar in authentic lived experiences, the study ensured that the instructional model was not only theoretically informed but also reflective of actual classroom realities and challenges. Through this process, the study transformed teachers' experiences into actionable knowledge and produced a practical Mathematics Lesson Exemplar designed to support effective and contextually responsive multigrade instruction in the Esperanza District.

### Statement of the problem

This study aimed to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the meaning and value of teachers' lived experiences in handling multigrade classes. Specifically, this qualitative inquiry sought to examine teachers' perceptions of their capabilities, explore their lived experiences across key dimensions of multigrade instruction, and determine the development of a validated Mathematics lesson exemplar grounded in the findings of the study.

1. How do teachers perceive their capabilities in handling multigrade classes?
2. What are the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in terms of lesson preparation, lesson delivery, classroom management, availability of instructional resources, and professional development opportunities?
3. Based on the findings, what validated lesson exemplar in Mathematics may be presented?

### METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using the phenomenological approach to capture and describe the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in the Esperanza District, Agusan del Sur. The phenomenological approach was selected because it enabled the researcher to explore how teachers personally experienced and made sense of teaching in multigrade classrooms. Through this design, the study sought to uncover the essence of their experiences, including their perceptions, challenges, strategies, and insights that shaped their professional identities and instructional practices. The qualitative orientation of the study allowed for an in-depth exploration of shared meanings and common patterns embedded in the participants' narratives, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of multigrade teaching within its natural context.

The research was conducted in the Esperanza District, a rural district within the Schools Division of Agusan del Sur. The district is characterized by geographically isolated and sparsely populated barangays where multigrade teaching remains a vital strategy for ensuring access to basic education. Public elementary schools in the district serve learners from different grade levels combined into one classroom due to limited teacher allocation, low enrollment, and the distance of communities from centralized schools. These contextual realities made the Esperanza District an appropriate and relevant locale for examining the lived experiences of multigrade teachers, as it reflects the practical conditions under which multigrade instruction is implemented.

The population of the study consisted of multigrade teachers from selected public elementary schools within the Esperanza District, Agusan del Sur. A total of ten 10 teachers

participated in the study. The participants were selected to represent various multigrade teaching contexts within the district to ensure diversity in terms of teaching experience, school setting, and instructional strategies. They were required to be currently handling multigrade classes in public elementary schools in the Esperanza District and to have at least three 3 years of experience managing multigrade classrooms. This criterion ensured that the participants possessed sufficient exposure to the challenges and dynamics of multigrade teaching and could provide rich and meaningful insights. The ten qualified participants were distributed across seven public elementary schools in the district. Batac Elementary School had 2 participants, Cebulan Elementary School had 1 participant, Datu Mankumbate Elementary School had 2 participants, Makalindang Elementary School had 2 participants, Maliwanag Elementary School had 1 participant, Segunda Elementary School had 1 participant, and Valentina Elementary School had 1 participant, resulting in a total of 10 participants. The selected sample size was deemed appropriate for a phenomenological study, as it allowed for an in depth and meaningful exploration of shared lived experiences.

A purposive sampling design was utilized to select participants who could provide rich, relevant, and experience-based data. This approach was appropriate for qualitative research because it allowed the researcher to intentionally identify individuals with substantial knowledge and practical experience in handling multigrade classes. By focusing on teachers who met specific inclusion criteria, the study ensured the credibility, depth, and relevance of the information gathered.

The primary instrument for data collection was a semi structured interview guide developed by the researcher. The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' perceptions of multigrade teaching, instructional strategies used in lesson preparation and delivery, classroom management practices, challenges encountered in terms of workload, instructional resources, and professional development, as well as their perceived effectiveness in multigrade teaching. It also included questions that solicited suggestions for improvement and possible enhancement programs that could support multigrade instruction. The interview guide was grounded in the objectives of the study and informed by an extensive review of relevant literature on multigrade teaching. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed and validated by three experts in the field of education, including experienced multigrade teachers and qualitative research specialists. Their feedback was carefully considered and incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the questions with the research objectives. The instrument was also pilot tested with one multigrade teacher outside the study area to confirm that the questions were clear, comprehensible, and capable of eliciting meaningful responses. Necessary revisions were made based on feedback from the validation and pilot testing processes to enhance the reliability and effectiveness of the instrument.

The validity of the instrument was established through careful alignment with the research objectives and expert validation, ensuring that the questions accurately captured the lived experiences, instructional practices, classroom management strategies, challenges, and perceptions of multigrade teachers. Reliability was ensured by consistently applying the validated interview guide across all participants and following uniform interview procedures, including standardized introductions, explanations of ethical considerations, and consistent sequencing of questions. All interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to preserve the accuracy of their responses. The trustworthiness of the data was further strengthened through member checking, wherein participants reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcriptions and the emerging themes to ensure faithful representation of their perspectives. Peer debriefing was also conducted to review the coding process and thematic analysis, thereby minimizing potential researcher bias and ensuring

consistent interpretation of the data. These procedures collectively ensured that the research instrument was both valid and reliable and that the findings authentically reflected the experiences of multigrade teachers in the Esperanza District.

Following the validation of the research instrument, the researcher adhered to Creswell's 2007 data gathering procedures. A formal request for authorization was submitted to the District Supervisor of Esperanza, clearly outlining the purpose and objectives of the study. Upon approval, an orientation session was conducted with the participants to explain the nature of the research, ethical considerations, and their rights, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time. This orientation ensured that participants fully understood the scope of the study and provided them with the opportunity to raise questions or express concerns prior to data collection. Individual in depth interviews were subsequently scheduled and conducted either in person or online, with each interview lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved. With participants' informed consent, audio recordings and field notes were utilized to ensure comprehensive and accurate documentation of responses. Transcribed interviews were returned to participants for member checking to verify accuracy and strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. All collected data were securely stored to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process.

Data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to organize and summarize relevant background information, while thematic analysis was employed to examine the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in the Esperanza District. Guided by Braun and Clarke 2006, thematic analysis was utilized to identify and interpret recurring themes within the dataset, allowing the researcher to uncover patterns, meanings, and the essence of participants' experiences. The analysis followed systematic steps. The researcher first familiarized themselves with the data by carefully reading and reviewing the transcribed interviews. Initial codes were then generated based on significant statements and key ideas identified in the narratives. Emerging themes were subsequently searched across participants' accounts to identify common patterns. The identified themes were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure accurate representation of the participants' experiences. Finally, the thematic analysis was written in a clear and meaningful manner to capture the depth and richness of the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in the Esperanza District.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the study based on data gathered from ten 10 multigrade teachers in selected public elementary schools in the Esperanza District, Agusan del Sur. Guided by a qualitative phenomenological research design and a purposive sampling approach, the study sought to capture and describe the lived experiences of teachers handling multigrade classes. Data were collected using a validated semi structured interview guide, and interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke 2006. The findings presented in this section are grounded directly in the narratives of the participants and are interpreted in relation to the objectives of the study, which focused on teachers' perceptions of their capabilities, their lived experiences in lesson preparation, lesson delivery, classroom management, availability of instructional resources, access to professional development opportunities, and their appreciation of multigrade teaching. The discussion integrates the participants' accounts with relevant scholarly literature to deepen understanding of the patterns and meanings that emerged from the data.

Teachers' perceptions of their capabilities in handling multigrade classes revealed that competence varied according to teaching experience. Participant T1 rated himself or herself as 70% capable and described the transition from monograde to pure multigrade teaching as challenging, particularly due to the need to adjust to diverse learners and increased workload. T2, T3, T4, T7, and T10 described themselves as competent, while T5 and T8 considered themselves strong and capable. In contrast, T6 stated, "I find it hard," and T9 described his or her capacities as still developing. These accounts demonstrate a clear distinction between experienced and novice teachers, with seasoned educators expressing greater confidence in managing multiple grade levels and newer teachers reporting difficulty in balancing instructional demands. The findings support the idea that teaching experience enhances adaptive strategies and resilience in multigrade settings, as emphasized by Romo 2021 and Bernardez-Gomez 2025. Teachers reported that competence developed gradually through daily classroom practice, experimentation, and reflection, highlighting that multigrade teaching requires persistence, flexibility, and problem-solving skills beyond subject knowledge. The data indicate that while multigrade teaching is inherently demanding, experience plays a critical role in shaping teachers' perceived effectiveness and ability to cope with classroom complexities.

Teachers' lived experiences in preparing lessons for multigrade classes were organized around four major themes: competency-based lesson plans, learner-based lesson plans, resource-based lesson plans, and the impact of ancillary tasks on lesson planning. Several participants, including T1, T5, T8, and T9, reported combining similar skills and creating tasks for multiple groups based on common competencies. T2 emphasized integrating lessons with common competencies and using thematic lessons with differentiated tasks. T3, T4, T7, and T10 described creating lesson plans for each grade level and designing activities that cater to multiple grade levels, reflecting learner-based planning. T6 noted preparing lesson plans according to available resources, illustrating resource-based planning. T10 admitted that sometimes lesson plans were not prepared due to other assignments, indicating that ancillary tasks hindered lesson planning. These findings show that competency-based lesson planning is both a necessity and a strategy in multigrade classrooms, as teachers carefully review curriculum competencies to identify overlapping skills that can be integrated. Participant T8 stated that preparing lessons for different grade levels is challenging but taught him or her to modify resources, gather materials, scaffold instruction, and integrate topics. This aligns with research by Little and Bender 2022 and Azano and Stewart 2021, which highlight integrated planning as effective in multigrade settings. Learner based planning was described by T7 as preparing separate lessons and adjusting activities according to abilities, with younger pupils needing more guidance and higher-grade pupils working independently. However, T7 also acknowledged that time constraints and workload sometimes limited formal lesson preparation. Resource based lesson planning was evident in T6's account of gathering whatever materials were available due to lack of references, reflecting findings by UNESCO 2021 and Santos and De Guzman 2024 that teachers in resource constrained contexts rely on adaptive planning. Ancillary tasks, such as reports that needed to be submitted asap, were reported by T10 as interfering with lesson preparation and causing pressure. These experiences highlight the tension between ideal differentiated planning and the realities of administrative workload, emphasizing the need for institutional support and manageable expectations.

In lesson delivery, teachers reported using station teaching, peer collaboration, differentiated instruction, and adaptive instruction as primary strategies. Participants T1 and T10 described using group activities and independent work, while T2, T3, T4, T8, and T9 provided direct instruction to one group while assigning independent tasks to another. T3 and T10 allowed peer tutoring, and T5 grouped learners according to abilities, reflecting flexible

grouping. T7 stated that he or she started with the group that needed more guidance before moving to another group, and T6 expressed difficulty due to lack of guides. These accounts illustrate that station teaching is a common strategy in which one group receives direct instruction while another engages in independent or peer assisted tasks. T1 noted the challenge of giving each group appropriate attention, and T10 emphasized flexibility and shifting strategies based on class dynamics. These practices align with research by Azano and Stewart 2021, Little and Bender 2022, and Tomlinson and Moon 2023, which support station teaching and flexible grouping in multigrade contexts. Peer collaboration was also emphasized by T9, who combined direct instruction, group work, learning stations, and independent tasks, starting with a whole class introduction before dividing learners into differentiated groups. Differentiated instruction was described by T3 as initially chaotic but later manageable through structured lesson blocks, clear routines, and consistent expectations. Adaptive instruction was exemplified by T7, who described switching between groups and providing targeted support as needed. Overall, the findings indicate that successful lesson delivery in multigrade classrooms depends on flexibility, continuous monitoring, and strategic balancing of direct and independent instruction.

In managing learners in multigrade classes, teachers highlighted assertive classroom management, development of leadership models, and promotion of motivation and well-being. T1 reported using routines and assigning roles to maintain order, while T2, T3, T4, T6, T7, T8, T9, and T10 established structured routines and clear expectations at the beginning of class. T3, T4, and T7 empowered older learners to assist younger ones, and T3 and T4 emphasized patience and consistent reinforcement. These practices reflect assertive classroom management, where rules, routines, and task delegation create a predictable environment. T2 noted arranging seating per grade level while remaining flexible for group activities and applying consistent rules to manage behavioral differences. The delegation of responsibilities to older learners fosters leadership and models positive behavior, supporting research by Little and Bender 2022, Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher 2023, and Azano and Stewart 2021. Teachers observed that clear roles and responsibilities enhance classroom harmony and learner motivation. The findings demonstrate that effective multigrade classroom management integrates structure, empathy, and learner centered strategies to support both academic and social emotional development.

Regarding availability and adequacy of instructional resources, teachers consistently reported inadequacy and unsuitability of materials for multigrade teaching. T1 and T7 stated that resources were not enough, prompting them to create their own materials. T2, T3, and T8 indicated that instructional materials were not designed for multigrade settings. T2, T3, T6, T8, T9, and T10 created flashcards, worksheets, and visual aids, while T3, T4, and T10 modified or improvised materials. T3 and T5 used local materials, T5 used multi-level activities and digital materials, T8 and T9 searched for materials online, and T6 borrowed books from another school. These findings demonstrate that teacher made instructional materials are widely used to supplement instruction. Participant T7 noted that materials are often incomplete or unavailable for specific subjects. T3 described modifying monograde resources and relying on self-made visual aids and repurposed materials. T6 shared the experience of borrowing books due to having nothing at all. These accounts align with Santos and De Guzman 2024 and UNESCO 2021, which document resource shortages in multigrade contexts. Teachers' use of local materials and technology-based resources reflect creativity and adaptability, but also underscores the urgent need for context appropriate multigrade instructional materials.

Teachers' experiences in accessing professional development opportunities revealed limited formal training and reliance on informal learning. Only one formal training was availed by 4 out of 10 multigrade teachers in the district. T1 reported no formal development training and relied on personal research and experienced colleagues. T3 collaborated with fellow

teachers, T10 joined online trainings and workshops, and T3, T5, T6, and T9 learned from their own experiences. T2, T5, T6, T8, and T10 stated that most trainings do not address specific needs of multigrade teaching, indicating irrelevant professional development opportunities. T3, T4, T7, and T9 confirmed attending only one formal training, demonstrating inadequacy of structured support. T6 stated, "I never attended any seminar about multigrade," and described feeling difficulty in handling classes. These findings align with Aliaga-Rojas et al. 2024, Ribeiro et al. 2022, Sharma and Sood 2021, UNESCO 2023, and OECD 2022, which emphasize the need for context specific professional development in multigrade settings. Teachers' reliance on research based and experiential learning reflects resilience, but also highlights systemic gaps in professional support.

Teachers' appreciation of multigrade teaching revealed themes of continuous growth, sustenance, and positive impact. T1 expressed love for multigrade teaching because it fostered patience, resourcefulness, and adaptability. T3 and T10 reported becoming more creative, flexible, and resilient. T2, T6, T7, and T9 stated they have no choice but to love multigrade teaching as it is their bread and butter. T3, T4, T8, and T10 valued strong relationships and family like classroom atmosphere, while T5 described fulfillment in seeing learners support one another and grow in confidence. These reflections indicate that despite challenges, multigrade teaching promotes professional growth and personal fulfillment. Research by Azano and Stewart 2021, Tomlinson and Moon 2023, and Little and Bender 2022 support the idea that complex teaching contexts foster adaptability and reflective practice. While some teachers' motivation is influenced by livelihood considerations, intrinsic satisfaction derived from learner success and collaborative classroom culture remains significant.

In summary, the findings from the ten 10 participants reveal that multigrade teaching in the Esperanza District is characterized by varied perceptions of competence shaped by experience, strategic lesson preparation rooted in integration and differentiation, flexible and adaptive lesson delivery, assertive and learner centered classroom management, creative responses to inadequate instructional resources, limited access to formal professional development, and a complex appreciation of teaching that blends personal growth with practical necessity. These results directly address the objectives of the study by providing an in depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences and highlighting both systemic challenges and adaptive strengths. The findings contribute to the body of knowledge on multigrade education by documenting context specific realities in a rural Philippine district and underscore the importance of targeted support, resource provision, and professional development. The insights gained from this analysis provide a foundation for the development of a contextually grounded Mathematics Lesson Exemplar and set the stage for the subsequent chapter, which presents implications, conclusions, and recommendations based on the evidence gathered.

## CONCLUSION

This study provided an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of teachers handling multigrade classes in the Esperanza District, with particular attention to their perceived capabilities, lesson preparation and delivery practices, classroom management strategies, availability of instructional resources, access to professional development opportunities, and appreciation of multigrade teaching. The research instrument was validated by three 3 experts, and data were gathered through in depth interviews with ten 10 multigrade teachers. Using thematic analysis, the study generated findings that illuminate the complex realities of multigrade instruction and the adaptive strategies teachers employ to sustain effective teaching and learning in resource constrained contexts.

The findings demonstrate that teachers' perceived capability in handling multigrade classes is strongly shaped by teaching experience. Experienced teachers generally viewed themselves as competent, strong, and capable, having developed confidence and practical coping strategies through sustained exposure, reflection, and continuous adaptation. In contrast, novice teachers described their abilities as still developing and expressed difficulty in managing workload, balancing multiple grade levels, and responding to classroom complexity. Across participants, adaptability, resilience, and flexibility emerged as essential competencies cultivated through daily classroom experiences, trial and error, and reflective practice. Over time, teachers reported gaining greater confidence in balancing lesson delivery, classroom management, and diverse learner needs, suggesting that competence in multigrade teaching develops progressively rather than instantaneously.

In relation to lesson preparation, the study revealed that multigrade teachers rely primarily on competency based and learner-based approaches, often integrating common competencies across grade levels or designing differentiated tasks tailored to varying abilities. Some teachers prepared separate lesson plans for each grade level, while others developed thematic or integrated plans to maximize instructional time. However, lesson preparation was frequently constrained by limited instructional resources and competing administrative responsibilities, which at times resulted in teachers proceeding without a formal lesson plan. Despite these constraints, participants consistently emphasized flexibility and creativity in adapting lessons to ensure that all learners could meaningfully engage with the curriculum. These findings indicate that multigrade lesson preparation is highly context driven and dependent on teachers' capacity to balance curricular demands with available resources and time.

With respect to lesson delivery, teachers commonly implemented rotational or station teaching strategies in which one group received direct instruction while other groups engaged in independent or collaborative activities. Adaptive instruction and peer mentoring were regularly employed to address diverse learner abilities and maintain engagement across grade levels. These approaches enabled teachers to distribute attention strategically and sustain instructional continuity within complex classroom environments. The findings suggest that effective lesson delivery in multigrade settings depends on structured yet flexible strategies that allow teachers to respond dynamically to learners' needs while maintaining overall classroom coherence.

Classroom management in multigrade contexts was perceived as particularly demanding due to differences in age, maturity, and academic readiness. Teachers reported that establishing structured routines, clear rules, and defined classroom roles was essential in maintaining order and promoting a supportive learning environment. Delegating responsibilities to older learners encouraged leadership modeling and fostered collaboration among students, contributing to both academic and social development. Patience, consistent reinforcement, and learner centered management strategies were identified as critical in sustaining motivation, engagement, and social emotional well-being. These findings underscore that successful multigrade classroom management integrates structure, shared responsibility, and relational care.

The availability and adequacy of instructional resources emerged as a persistent concern. Teachers consistently reported that existing materials were either insufficient or not designed for multigrade classrooms. In response, they demonstrated considerable resourcefulness by creating teacher made materials, utilizing local resources, modifying available materials, borrowing books from other schools, and searching for digital and online resources. While these adaptive practices enabled instructional continuity, they also placed additional demands on teachers' time and effort. The findings highlight a systemic gap in the provision of context appropriate instructional materials for multigrade teaching.

Professional development opportunities specific to multigrade instruction were also found to be limited. Many participants indicated that available workshops and trainings were either insufficient or not tailored to the unique demands of multigrade classrooms. Consequently, teachers relied heavily on informal professional learning strategies, including self-study, collaboration with colleagues, reflective practice, and participation in online trainings. These experiences suggest that while teachers demonstrate initiative and commitment to professional growth, the absence of structured and relevant professional development programs limits opportunities to strengthen specialized multigrade pedagogical skills.

Despite the challenges identified, teachers' appreciation of multigrade teaching evolved over time. Many participants reported that sustained engagement in multigrade classrooms fostered personal and professional growth, including increased patience, creativity, flexibility, and resilience. For some, appreciation was shaped by intrinsic fulfillment derived from witnessing learners' academic progress, peer collaboration, and leadership development within a family like classroom atmosphere. For others, practical considerations related to livelihood influenced their acceptance and commitment to multigrade teaching. Nonetheless, the findings reveal that multigrade instruction, while demanding, offers meaningful opportunities for growth and fulfillment.

Drawing from these findings, the study concludes that teachers' capability in handling multigrade classes develops progressively through experience, adaptation, and reflective practice. Lesson preparation is inherently flexible and context sensitive, yet constrained by workload and limited resources. Effective lesson delivery depends on strategic approaches such as station teaching, peer support, and adaptive instruction. Classroom management requires structured routines, clear expectations, and active learner participation, particularly through task delegation to older learners. Instructional resources for multigrade teaching remain inadequate, prompting reliance on creativity, local materials, and technology-based resources. Professional development opportunities specific to multigrade contexts are insufficient and often irrelevant, leading teachers to depend on informal and experiential learning strategies. Teachers' appreciation of multigrade teaching deepens over time as they experience professional growth and emotional fulfillment amid contextual challenges.

In response to these conclusions, the study underscores several recommendations that emerge directly from the findings. Parents may strengthen multigrade education by reinforcing learning at home, supporting collaborative learning among siblings or peers, and participating in school initiatives that enhance instructional strategies and localized materials. School administrators and supervisors may establish mentoring and coaching programs that pair novice teachers with experienced multigrade practitioners, promote collaborative lesson planning, and support the development of professional learning communities focused on multigrade instruction. Administrators may also provide institutional support for the creation of localized and innovative instructional materials. Teachers are encouraged to continue engaging in reflective practice, collaboration, and self-directed professional learning while sharing best practices with colleagues to build collective capacity. Future researchers may expand the scope of investigation by involving larger samples or multiple districts to enhance transferability of findings, exploring learners' and parents' perspectives, and examining the long-term effects of targeted professional development programs on instructional performance and learner outcomes.

Finally, grounded in the lived experiences and best practices reported by participants, a validated week-long Mathematics Lesson Exemplar for Grades 5 and 6 was developed. This exemplar integrates differentiated instruction, station teaching, peer mentoring, and adaptive strategies to address the learning needs of multiple grade levels within a single classroom. In

synthesizing the study's findings and recommendations, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of multigrade teaching in rural contexts and offers practical, context responsive insights that can inform policy, professional development, and instructional design. Through this integrated conclusion, the study affirms the resilience and creativity of multigrade teachers while emphasizing the systemic support necessary to sustain and strengthen multigrade education.

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