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Promotion of maximum class participation in multigrade elementary classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the promotion of maximum class participation in multigrade elementary classrooms. Aspects of student participation included: (a) learning resources; (b) teacher-related factors; (c) assessment and feedback practices as well as challenges experienced by teachers when providing feedback during questioning. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed involving two multigrade teachers from Ligayan Elementary School. Data were gathered through classroom observations, COT-RPMS document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that learning resources, teacher-related factors, and assessment and feedback practices positively impacted student participation through use of student-engaging instructional materials, structuring their classroom environment, and being adequately prepared to teach at an adequate level. In addition, teacher assessments/feedback contributed to creating an environment in which student participation occurred. However, challenges existed. Specifically, varying levels of readiness among students and dividing time among multiple classes resulted in inconsistent application of questioning and feedback. Limitations to providing immediate support to each student resulted from these challenges. The study concluded that maximizing student participation in multigrade settings results from the complex interactions of instructional strategies, teacher behaviors, and limitations presented by the setting itself. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers be given professional development training to enhance their abilities in developing lesson plans, organizing their classroom, asking questions appropriately, and delivering constructive feedback.

Keywords: Class participation, multigrade elementary classrooms, questioning strategies, feedback practices, classroom interaction, teacher-related factors, qualitative research.

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INTRODUCTION

Active classroom is an important part of the quality education learners receive. Quality participation allows students to respond to questions, articulate their ideas, engage in dialogue, and collaborate with teachers and fellow students. In a paradigm where classrooms are

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increasingly heterogeneous, it is a challenge for teachers to ensure sustained participation and engagement from students whose needs differ from one another. In resource poor settings, multigrade classrooms are most suitable to ensure equitable access to education but do not come without their challenges. Teaching students from multiple grades in a single classroom is a common practice in rural and remote areas. Such classroom arrangements are appropriate when limited human and material resources make it difficult to sustain separate classrooms for each grade. However, they also impose significant burdens in terms of instructional practices, classroom management, and ensuring engagement from all students across grade levels (DepEd, 2025).

In the Philippine context, multigrade schooling is a priority in education for remote and underserved areas in the country. As stated in the SEAMEO INNOTECH review, the number of multigrade schools in the country has decreased to 12,799 during the School Year 2009–2010, however, multigrade schooling is still embedded in the basic education system and continues to be in need of policy and instructional support (DepEd, 2022). The regional data within that review revealed that during the School Year 2017–2018 Cordillera Administrative Region represented 9.51% of the country's multigrade schools, demonstrating that multigrade schools in the region still exist (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2020). Although no single recent public document with specific data is available, DepEd issuances and ongoing multigrade related interventions attest to the fact that multigrade teaching is still an active educational practice in the local divisions and hardship areas (DepEd, 2021).

At the regional and local levels, multigrade classrooms often have the following limited resources, varying degrees of learner readiness, and the need for teachers to multitask. Balbalan and Kalinga, for instance, Multigrade classrooms such as Ligayan Elementary School, report having greater challenges in achieving sustained participation for all pupils. There are also recent findings of multigrade schools in the Philippines and reports that indicate the schools are part of the learning recovery and digital support initiatives. For instance, UNICEF Philippines states that 345 teachers were trained, and technology-based interventions were implemented across 96 multigrade schools in the Dinagat Islands and Southern Leyte. This emphasizes the continuing presence of multigrade schools and the need for more substantial instructional support in these schools (UNICEF Philippines, 2024). Without the teacher's skillful use of stimulating resources, thoughtful planning of classroom routines, proficient questioning, and purposeful feedback designed to solicit further response from the learners, the opportunities for participation may not be fully utilized (Cedeño & Mongas, 2025).

One of the perplexing issues in teaching multigrade classes is how teachers can optimize participation, given the nature of a multigrade classroom. Previous studies have demonstrated that feedback, teaching methods, classroom organization, teacher engagement, and other factors, significantly contribute to student participation and engagement in the classroom. Additionally, national report cards on multigrade education have pointed out that the issue of access is not the only concern; the teaching and learning experiences of students in multigrade classrooms remain a persistent challenge. While some previous studies have suggested that multigrade schools may reach a comparable level of learning quality to monograde schools with appropriate assistance, that same literature points to ongoing instructional and resource gaps that impact participation and learning (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2020).

However, there are still few studies that focus on specific classroom practices, particularly resources, teachers, and assessment and feedback, that contribute to the optimum level of participation in multigrade elementary classrooms, particularly in the local context. Given this, the present study aims to focus on the gaps that exist, particularly on the ways teachers foster maximum participation in multigrade elementary classrooms, the issues and

challenges they face in questioning and feedback, and the teacher-development program that may be proposed to enhance teaching-learning engagement.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to examine how teachers promote maximum classroom participation in multigrade elementary classrooms. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers promote maximum class participation in multigrade elementary classrooms in terms of learning resources, teacher related factors, and assessment and feedback?
2. What issues and challenges do teachers encounter in using questioning and feedback strategies to promote maximum class participation?
3. What teacher development program may be proposed to enhance teaching and learning engagement in multigrade elementary classrooms?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how multigrade teachers foster maximum participation during class activities within natural classroom contexts. The design was selected because it captures real life teaching practices, contextual realities, and lived experiences, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of classroom participation in multigrade settings. Data triangulation was utilized through classroom observation, COT-RPMS document analysis, and semi structured interviews to ensure depth and credibility of the findings. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes aligned with the research questions.

The participants of the study were the multigrade teachers of Ligayan Elementary School in Balantoy, Balbalan, Kalinga. Specifically, two teachers handling multigrade classes served as participants. One teacher handled a multigrade class composed of Kindergarten to Grade 2 pupils, while the other handled a multigrade class composed of Grade 3 and Grade 4 pupils. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they were directly involved in teaching multigrade classes and possessed relevant experiences in promoting classroom participation among pupils of different grade levels. Although the number of participants was limited, the study focused on obtaining in depth and context specific insights through classroom observations and semi structured interviews, which is consistent with qualitative research principles.

The study utilized three primary data gathering instruments, namely a classroom observation tool based on the Department of Education Classroom Observation Tool aligned with the Results Based Performance Management System, COT-RPMS document analysis, and a semi structured interview guide. The main instrument was the classroom observation tool adapted from the Department of Education Classroom Observation Tool aligned with the Results Based Performance Management System. This standardized tool was used to examine how teachers promote maximum class participation in multigrade elementary classrooms. The observation focused on indicators relevant to the study, particularly learning resources, teacher related factors, and assessment and feedback practices, including the utilization of diverse teaching strategies, classroom organization, learner engagement, questioning techniques in classrooms, and feedback practices. The observation was anchored on national standards of teaching and performance indicators prescribed by the Department of Education. In addition,

classroom observation records from the COT-RPMS of the teacher participants were reviewed to provide supplementary information about teachers' classroom practices and performance based on official evaluation outcomes. A semi structured interview guide was also employed to gather in depth information regarding teachers' strategies and challenges in promoting maximum class participation. The interview questions were aligned with the research questions and allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences, particularly in the use of questioning and feedback. All instruments were aligned with the objectives of the study to ensure consistency and credibility of the data gathered.

The data gathering procedure followed a systematic approach that ensured alignment with the research objectives and adherence to ethical considerations. Initially, the researcher secured official permission to conduct the study by submitting a request to the Schools Division Superintendent and subsequently to the head of the selected school. Upon approval, the researcher sought the willingness of the teacher participants to take part in the study. Informed consent was obtained after explaining the purpose of the study, and confidentiality was ensured throughout the process. Classroom observations were then conducted using the Department of Education Classroom Observation Tool aligned with the Results Based Performance Management System. The observations focused on selected indicators related to learning resources, teacher related factors, and assessment and feedback practices. Each teacher participant was observed while teaching in their multigrade classes, and field notes were recorded to document classroom dynamics, teaching styles, questioning strategies, and feedback practices that encouraged participation. Following the observations, the researcher examined the COT-RPMS classroom observation records of the teacher participants. These documents were analyzed for evidence of teaching strategies, classroom management, learner engagement, and assessment practices, and served as corroborating evidence to support the findings from classroom observations. Subsequently, semi structured interviews were conducted with the teacher participants to gain deeper insights into their strategies for achieving maximum class participation as well as their questioning and feedback practices. The interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences based on both their teaching practices and observed classroom interactions. The responses were recorded with permission and transcribed for analysis. Finally, all collected data from classroom observations, COT-RPMS document analysis, and interviews were organized and prepared for analysis, and data triangulation was employed by comparing information from the three data sources to ensure the credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness of the findings.

The gathered data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within the data derived from interviews and classroom observations related to how teachers promote maximum class participation in multigrade classrooms. Classroom observation and semi structured interview data were recorded, transcribed, and carefully examined. Meaningful statements were identified and grouped into categories with similar meanings, which were then expanded into higher order themes connected to the research questions, particularly in relation to learning resources, teacher related factors, assessment and feedback practices, and the challenges encountered by teachers. To strengthen the analysis, data triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from classroom observations, interview responses, and COT-RPMS classroom observation records, ensuring credibility and consistency of the results. Furthermore, COT-RPMS ratings and indicators were used as supporting evidence to describe the observed teaching practices. These were interpreted using the qualitative descriptors provided in the COT-RPMS tool, such as Outstanding and Very Satisfactory, to reinforce the identified themes. However, these ratings were not treated as the primary basis of analysis but were used to substantiate the qualitative findings.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the study on the promotion of maximum class participation in multigrade elementary classrooms, drawing on data generated from classroom observations, COT-RPMS classroom observation records, and semi-structured interviews with 2 multigrade teacher-subjects from Ligayan Elementary School, Balbalan, Kalinga. The study employed a qualitative research design utilizing purposive sampling, with data collected through observation tools and interview protocols and analyzed through thematic analysis supported by descriptive COT-RPMS ratings. The discussion that follows is grounded strictly in the data gathered and interpreted in direct relation to the objectives of the study, ensuring that all findings are contextualized within the realities of multigrade instruction and supported by both observational evidence and documented performance indicators.

The findings reveal that teachers promoted maximum class participation through the strategic use of learning resources, particularly through engaging instructional materials and well-structured lesson starters. Interview data indicate that both subject teachers deliberately used visual aids such as colorful clocks and charts, songs, short videos, interactive questioning, and hands-on activities to capture learner attention and initiate participation. One subject emphasized that reliance on varied and stimulating materials is necessary to prevent disengagement, particularly among younger learners, while the other highlighted the importance of motivational activities and gamified strategies at the beginning of lessons. These practices were consistently observed during classroom sessions, where learners responded actively to songs, visual prompts, and structured interactive tasks. This qualitative evidence is reinforced by the COT-RPMS results, where both Subject Teacher 1 and Subject Teacher 2 obtained Outstanding ratings of 6 in Indicator 2, which pertains to the use of a range of teaching strategies that enhance learner achievement, and Indicator 8, which focuses on selecting, developing, organizing, and using appropriate teaching and learning resources. Their overall observation averages of 5.78 and 5.89, interpreted as Very Satisfactory, further substantiate the consistent implementation of these strategies in actual classroom practice. These findings demonstrate that engaging instructional materials function as effective entry points to participation, reducing passivity and increasing responsiveness among learners. This interpretation aligns with Ryan (2024), who emphasized that active engagement increases when learners are encouraged to respond and participate through varied tasks, and with Cedeño and Mongas (2025), as well as Guerrero et al. (2024), who identified instructional materials and interactive strategies as key drivers of classroom participation.

Sustained participation across grade levels was further supported by structured classroom organization and instructional preparedness. The subject teachers described the importance of designing differentiated entry points within the same activity, allowing learners from different grade levels to participate according to their developmental readiness. For instance, during a telling time lesson, Kinder pupils identified numbers, Grade 1 pupils read the hour, and Grade 2 pupils explained the concept of time, ensuring that all learners remained engaged. Both teachers emphasized that lack of preparation leads to disorganized transitions and idle time, which directly reduces participation. Observational data confirmed that teachers implemented activity rotation, independent tasks, and group work to maintain engagement while attending to different grade groups. These practices were again supported by COT-RPMS indicators, particularly Indicator 4 on classroom structuring, Indicator 7 on developmentally sequenced planning and teaching, and Indicator 8 on organizing teaching and learning materials, where both teachers obtained Outstanding ratings of 6. The overall observation averages of 5.78 and 5.89, interpreted as Very Satisfactory, indicate a high level of instructional

organization and preparedness. These findings highlight that structured routines, clear instructions, and effective task management prevent disengagement and ensure continuous participation across multiple grade levels. This is consistent with Lacre and Valle (2024), who found that structured classroom management enhances participation, and with the Australian Education Research Organisation (2024), which emphasized that predictable routines support learner engagement, as well as Cedeño and Mongas (2025), who underscored the role of classroom organization in academic engagement.

Teacher-related factors also emerged as critical in promoting participation, particularly the role of positive teaching disposition. The subject teachers reported that their energy, enthusiasm, facial expressions, and tone significantly influenced learners' willingness to participate. One teacher noted that a dull demeanor leads to disengagement, whereas enthusiasm encourages even shy learners to participate, while the other emphasized that approachability fosters learner responsiveness. Classroom observations confirmed that both teachers demonstrated supportive and encouraging behavior, creating a positive classroom climate that facilitated participation. This was further supported by COT-RPMS results in Indicator 5 on managing learner behavior constructively and Indicator 6 on using differentiated, developmentally appropriate learning experiences, where both teachers received Outstanding ratings of 6. Their overall observation averages of 5.78 and 5.89, interpreted as Very Satisfactory, reinforce the presence of these positive teacher-related practices. These findings indicate that teacher disposition functions as a key interpersonal factor influencing learner confidence and engagement. This interpretation is supported by Quiblat and Ubayubay (2025), OECD (2025), and Mwakapina et al. (2023), all of whom identified teacher behavior, classroom climate, and instructional interaction as determinants of student engagement.

In addition to disposition, instructional preparedness and classroom management were found to strengthen sustained participation. The subject teachers emphasized that preparation ensures smooth transitions, prevents idle time, and maintains learner engagement, whereas lack of preparation leads to confusion and reduced participation. Observations revealed that teachers implemented step-by-step instruction, organized tasks, and managed transitions effectively to sustain engagement across grade levels. These practices were reflected in COT-RPMS results, particularly in Indicator 4 on classroom structuring, Indicator 5 on managing learner behavior, and Indicator 7 on planning and implementing teaching and learning, where both teachers obtained Outstanding ratings of 6. The overall observation averages of 5.78 and 5.89, interpreted as Very Satisfactory, further confirm the effectiveness of these practices. These findings suggest that instructional preparedness and classroom management are essential for maintaining continuous participation in multigrade settings. This is supported by OECD (2025), Cinadre (2023), and Cedeño and Mongas (2025), who emphasized the importance of planning, organization, and management in enhancing learner engagement and instructional effectiveness.

Assessment and feedback practices also played a significant role in promoting participation, particularly through differentiated and distributed questioning. The subject teachers reported that they adjusted questions according to learners' developmental levels, using simple questions for younger pupils, follow-up questions for intermediate learners, and higher-order questions for older pupils. They also emphasized the importance of asking questions to the whole class before calling on individual learners, providing wait time, and encouraging broader participation. Classroom observations confirmed that teachers used varied questioning techniques and distributed questions across learners from different grade levels. These practices were supported by COT-RPMS results in Indicator 2 on using a range of teaching strategies, Indicator 3 on developing critical and creative thinking, and Indicator 6 on differentiated learning experiences, where both teachers received Outstanding ratings of 6. Their overall observation averages of 5.78 and 5.89, interpreted as Very Satisfactory, further

validate the effective use of questioning strategies. These findings indicate that questioning serves not only as an assessment tool but also as a participation strategy when adapted to learner readiness and distributed equitably. This interpretation aligns with the NSW Department of Education (2024), Miroyan et al. (2023), and Alda and Gementiza (2023), who emphasized the role of effective questioning in enhancing engagement and participation.

Affirming and gentle corrective feedback was also found to sustain engagement and strengthen classroom interaction. The subject teachers emphasized that feedback should be immediate, supportive, and constructive, avoiding direct negative responses such as "wrong" and instead using phrases like "Almost correct" or "Good try" to maintain learner confidence. Observations confirmed that teachers used praise combined with guidance and encouraged peer collaboration when correcting responses. This was supported by COT-RPMS results, particularly in Indicator 5 on managing learner behavior constructively, where both teachers received ratings of 6, and Indicator 9 on using diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment, where Subject Teacher 1 received 5, interpreted as Very Satisfactory, and Subject Teacher 2 received 6, interpreted as Outstanding. The overall observation averages of 5.78 and 5.89, interpreted as Very Satisfactory, further confirm the presence of supportive feedback practices. These findings demonstrate that affirming feedback maintains learner motivation and encourages continued participation, even when responses are incorrect. This interpretation is supported by Rabbani et al. (2024), Yasmin et al. (2026), and Cinadre (2023), who highlighted the role of constructive feedback in enhancing motivation and engagement.

Despite these strengths, the study also identified challenges in the use of questioning and feedback strategies, particularly due to varied learner readiness and divided teacher attention. The subject teachers reported that differences in thinking speed, confidence, and comprehension levels made it difficult to design questions that are appropriate for all learners. Some pupils responded quickly, while others required additional time and scaffolding, leading to uneven participation. Observations confirmed that some learners required prompting while others responded readily. These challenges were reflected in COT-RPMS indicators, particularly Indicator 6 on differentiation and Indicator 3 on higher-order thinking, where teachers received ratings of 6, interpreted as Outstanding, while overall observation averages of 5.78 and 5.89, interpreted as Very Satisfactory, indicate strong but not uniform engagement across learners. These findings suggest that learner diversity requires continuous adjustment of questioning strategies. This interpretation is consistent with Verano (2023), OECD (2023), and Ares-Ferreirós et al. (2025), who identified learner variability as a key challenge in promoting participation.

Another major challenge identified was divided teacher attention, which limited the consistency of questioning and feedback. The subject teachers reported difficulty in providing immediate and individualized feedback due to the need to manage multiple grade levels simultaneously. Observations confirmed that teachers alternated between groups, resulting in limited interaction time for each learner. This was reflected in COT-RPMS results, particularly in Indicator 4 on classroom structure and Indicator 7 on planning and implementation, where both teachers received ratings of 6, interpreted as Outstanding, and Indicator 9 on assessment strategies, where Subject Teacher 1 received 5, interpreted as Very Satisfactory, and Subject Teacher 2 received 6, interpreted as Outstanding. The overall observation averages of 5.78 and 5.89, interpreted as Very Satisfactory, indicate effective but constrained instructional practices. These findings highlight that structural conditions in multigrade classrooms inherently limit the extent of teacher interaction with individual learners. This interpretation is supported by Ares-Ferreirós et al. (2025), Parfitt and Gristy (2025), and UNESCO Global Education

Monitoring Report Team (2024), who emphasized the complexity of managing multiple grade levels and the need for context-specific instructional strategies.

Based on these findings, a teacher-development program titled MULTIGRADE ENGAGE was proposed to enhance teaching-learning engagement in multigrade elementary classrooms. Anchored on Republic Act No. 10533, Republic Act No. 9155, DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, and DepEd Order No. 10, s. 2024, the program aims to strengthen teachers' competencies in using engaging learning resources, improving instructional preparedness, fostering positive teaching disposition, implementing differentiated questioning, and providing constructive feedback. The program includes workshops, training sessions, mentoring, and post-implementation monitoring designed to address both strengths and challenges identified in the study, particularly learner diversity and divided teacher attention. The expected outcome is improved teacher proficiency and a more interactive, inclusive, and participation-driven classroom environment.

In synthesis, the findings demonstrate that maximum class participation in multigrade elementary classrooms is achieved through the combined influence of engaging learning resources, structured classroom organization, positive teacher disposition, instructional preparedness, differentiated questioning, and supportive feedback practices, all of which were consistently evidenced by COT-RPMS ratings of 6 and overall observation averages of 5.78 and 5.89 interpreted as Very Satisfactory. At the same time, challenges related to varied learner readiness and divided teacher attention highlight the inherent complexities of multigrade instruction. These results directly address the objectives of the study by identifying both effective strategies and existing constraints, contributing to a deeper understanding of participation dynamics in multigrade settings and providing a basis for targeted professional development interventions, thereby preparing the groundwork for subsequent discussions on implementation and policy implications.

CONCLUSION

In light of the foregoing findings, it is concluded that the promotion of maximum class participation in multigrade elementary classrooms is fundamentally shaped by the teacher's effective use of learning resources, the presence of positive teacher-related factors, and the implementation of appropriate assessment and feedback practices. The results demonstrate that the use of engaging instructional materials, motivating lesson starters, well-structured classroom organization, and strong instructional preparedness plays a critical role in sustaining the active involvement of pupils across different grade levels. These elements collectively contribute to a learning environment that is both organized and stimulating, thereby enabling learners to participate more actively despite the inherent complexity of multigrade settings. Furthermore, the findings affirm that teachers' positive disposition, enthusiasm, approachability, and effective classroom management significantly influence the development of a supportive and participation-oriented classroom climate, which in turn fosters consistent learner engagement.

The study further establishes that active participation among pupils of varying grade levels is strengthened through the use of differentiated and distributed questioning strategies, along with feedback that is both affirming and gently corrective. These pedagogical practices expand opportunities for participation, sustain learner confidence, and enhance the quality of classroom interaction. However, the findings also reveal that the consistent implementation of such strategies is challenged by differences in learner readiness and the division of teacher attention across multiple grade levels. These constraints highlight the need for deliberate instructional adjustments and targeted support mechanisms to ensure that all learners are equally engaged. In response to these conditions, the study concludes that the development and

implementation of a structured teacher-development program is essential to strengthen multigrade teachers' competencies in utilizing learning resources, organizing classrooms effectively, applying differentiated questioning techniques, and delivering constructive feedback. Such a program is critical in enhancing overall teaching-learning engagement within multigrade elementary classrooms.

Building on these conclusions, it is recommended that multigrade teachers continue to refine and strengthen their use of engaging learning resources, positive teaching practices, and appropriate assessment and feedback strategies to sustain high levels of class participation among pupils across grade levels. It is also recommended that teachers and school heads collaboratively design and implement practical classroom support measures, including improved task organization, differentiated instructional activities, and effective strategies for managing diverse learner readiness and divided instructional attention. These measures are necessary to address the challenges associated with questioning and feedback practices in multigrade contexts. In addition, schools are encouraged to adopt and operationalize the proposed teacher-development program, MULTIGRADE ENGAGE: A Teacher-Development Program to Enhance Teaching-Learning Engagement in Multigrade Elementary Classrooms, as a strategic intervention to strengthen teacher competencies in key instructional areas such as learning resource utilization, classroom organization, differentiated questioning, and constructive feedback. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct related studies with a broader scope, larger participant groups, and the inclusion of additional qualitative data sources in order to generate deeper insights into teaching-learning engagement and class participation in multigrade elementary classrooms, thereby contributing to the continuous improvement of instructional practices in similar educational contexts.

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