

Exploring Diverse Factors Affecting Teachers in Teaching Multi-Grade Classes

Rose Marie C. Rayas^{1*}, Henry R. Inciso², Kirsten Julia B. Servano³, Jovelyn M. Ranille⁴, Rose Anne S. Sumeguín⁵, Monica G. Espiritu⁶
Eastern Samar State University, Guiuan Campus, Guiuan

Corresponding Author: Rose Marie C. Rayas arcieleon25@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the diverse factors affecting the delivery of quality education by multi-grade teachers in selected remote elementary schools during the 2023–2024 school year, using a phenomenological approach with 10 teachers from Eastern Samar. Six themes emerged: resource allocation, environmental factors, pedagogical challenges, training needs, financial concerns, and psychological stressors. The findings revealed that teachers often used personal funds due to delayed government support and faced poor infrastructure and limited digital access. Pedagogical issues included managing diverse learners and limited instructional time, but teachers used innovative strategies like differentiated instruction and peer tutoring. Psychological stress such as burnout was common, highlighting the need for emotional resilience. The study emphasized the importance of targeted professional development and systemic support tailored to multi-grade teaching realities, urging policy reforms in training, funding, resources, and mental health support to improve education in isolated communities.

INTRODUCTION

As an archipelago comprising more than 7,000 islands, the conveyance of government administrations, such as education, remains challenging and meager. In further areas, classrooms hone multi-grade education where one educator instructs students from diverse review levels to address availability and instructor accessibility (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2020). The multi-grade program was propelled as an efficient and practical implication of assembly of the objective of instruction and giving Education to All (Scribd & Cervantes, 2011). All societal sectors that provide basic, high-quality education help their student's live better lives and become more capable of contributing to their country's development. The "Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001," also known as Republic Act 9155, requires elementary education to be accessible and free. As a result, the Multi-grade Program in Philippine Education was launched under DepEd Order No. 86, establishing Multi-Grade schools in barangays without schools (Abannag, 2023).

In the Philippines, multi-grade classes are commonly found in basic schools located in remote areas, where only a few students are enrolled at each grade level. As a result, teachers are required to handle multiple grade levels simultaneously (Kleinman, 2004). Moreover, multigrade teaching involves instructing children from two or more grade levels within a single classroom (Romo, 2021).

Furthermore, the distance between the barangays, deficiencies of instructors, budget, and school offices were among the variables that drove the arrangement of Multi-Grade Classes in various parts of the Philippines. Multi-grade types were established because the number of students enrolled in each grade level was insufficient to form a single-grade class (Dulana, Dacanay, & Perez, 2023). Multi-grade instructing strategies are prioritized, and they hold specific pertinence within the Philippines due to socio-economic and political challenges that affect the instruction of Filipino children (Tayoni, 2023).

According to Daga (2021) the DepEd Order 81, s. 2009 stipulates that multi-grade instruction is one of the department's techniques to supply get-to-quality instruction for all school-age children in farther communities where enrolment does not warrant the organization of monograde classes. This arrangement infers the institutionalized execution of the Multi-grade Program in Philippine Instruction. In addition, The Philippine Constitution aids the right of every Filipino to quality primary education. Education does not segregate; indeed, the inaccessible and far-flung regions are being come to ensure the correct of everybody. In this manner, the Multi-Grade Program in Philippine Instruction (MPPE) was made in 1993 through Office of Instruction Culture and Sports (DECS) Order No. 83 and was supported by DECS Order No. 96, series 1997 (Dulana et al., 2023).

Thus, this study aims to explore diverse factors affecting teachers' ability to deliver quality education in multi-grade classes, particularly those in remote areas. Additionally, the researchers will investigate the teacher's perspective, environmental factors, pedagogical factors, resource allocation priorities, and financial and psychological factors. The result of this study is hoped to contribute

to the decision-making process by policymakers and stakeholders in creating a learning environment that supports the multi-faceted needs of multi-grade classes and caters to quality education, specifically in Diverse Elementary School teachers' teaching in Multi-grade Classes.

The research gap in this study centered on the insufficient exploration of how the multifaceted challenges – pedagogical, environmental, resource-related, financial, and psychological – uniquely affected multi-grade teachers in remote Philippine elementary schools from the teachers' lived perspectives. While existing literature documented the prevalence of multi-grade classes, resource shortages, and general teacher difficulties, it provided limited qualitative insight into how these factors affect teaching quality and teacher well-being in geographically isolated settings. Furthermore, previous studies often overlook the specific professional development needs to be tailored to multi-grade contexts and the coping mechanisms teachers employ. There is also a lack of comprehensive policy evaluation regarding the effectiveness of current support systems like DepEd orders and financial allowances. Addressing this gap requires phenomenological research that captures teachers' experiences to inform targeted training, resource allocation, and policy reforms that enhance educational delivery in multi-grade classrooms in marginalized communities.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Review of Related Literature

According to Arevalo (2021), teaching students of different ages, skill levels, and levels in the same classroom at the same time is known as multigrade teaching. When a teacher uses multigrade teaching, they can instruct many classes or grades at once, either in distinct classrooms or in one large room with partitions between them.

In instructing in multi-grade classrooms, instructors as a rule encounter issues with students' aptitudes, such as trouble in composing and other scholastic issues (Blease & Condry, 2015).

According to Quejada and Orale (2018) the school is deficient in the essential teaching-learning resources. Some students don't read at all, and many learn slowly. In order to, teachers must ride a motorbike and walk km over occasionally muddy and dangerous trails. Some pupils walk every day to school from nearby barangays.

Furthermore, Samar is among the nation's poorer provinces (PSA, 2017) with populations in the remote villages or remote areas in terms of geography underprivileged regions (GIDA) as the lowest. Teachers in these regions must take walks.

Most nations still struggle to provide their students with a high-quality education because there aren't enough qualified instructors, schools aren't in good shape, and kids from rural areas don't have as many opportunities as their urban counterparts (UNDP, 2018).

In the study of Taole and Mncube's (2017), educates and understudies were constrained to utilize the government-mandated educational programs for mono-grade schools due to the need of a contextualized and localized multigrade

instructing educational programs. In addition, Taole (2018), understudies in a multigrade course are special and call for a one of a kind plan of appraisal exercises.

In any case, multi-grade classrooms are a “nightmare” for instructors since they must plan the lesson to offer to each review level within the classroom (Blease & Condry, 2014). They are common and some of the time required in locales where there are numerous understudies but few instructors (Å±Å±krÄ±k, 2017). Based on Prof. K. V. Wofford's investigation, to begin with, moment, and third graders were gathered as one multi-grade classroom, and fourth and fifth graders as another (Deniz, 2019). Depending on its sort, can move forward understudy performance' (Butler, 1998, p. 89). Other than, Dheeraj and Memon (2019) said: “curriculum of multi-grade classes have to be include such themes which are coordinates and simple to choose a common point for multi-grade class.”

Review of Related Studies

This study's objective is to pinpoint the primary issues that emerge in multi-grade teachers in teaching multi-grade classes. This research was designed as a qualitative research method.

According to (Bua & Martin, 2020) it was shown that including cooperative learning activities into multi-grade classes is essential to the teaching and learning process, and the majority of the problems encountered by the teachers are moderate and minor.

In multi-grade classrooms, integrating technology reveals teachers' challenges and attitudes. It highlights obstacles like resource accessibility and student technical competency, contributing to improving teaching methods in diverse settings by addressing technology's complexities and offering tactics for effective utilization (Nguyen, 2019).

In order to create a supportive environment for diverse classrooms, teachers and parents must work together (Harris, 2020). In addition, the study of (Msimanga M. R., 2020) investigate on how teaching and learning are conducted, how the learning environment is set up, and how assessment is used in multi-grade classes to gauge student progress toward learning objectives.

Theoretical Framework

The Value-based Demonstrate of Stretch and Adapting by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) "The Value-based Demonstrate of Push and Adapting" fought that a person's capacity to manage and alter to challenges and issues may be a result of exchanges (or intelligent) that happen between an individual and their environment. The TSC (Folkman, 2008; Lazarus, 2006; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) prototypical states, challenge and danger, emerge from cognitive judgments of the meaning of a circumstance and one's capacity to reply to the circumstance.

Teachers teaching multi-grade classes may be influenced by Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Their physiological health is crucial in managing the demands of teaching multiple grades simultaneously. Safety and security, including job security, a safe physical environment, and access to necessary resources, are essential. A sense of belonging within the school community and

support from colleagues, administrators, and parents greatly impact their ability to effectively manage multi-grade classes. Recognition, respect, and opportunities for professional development fulfill their esteem needs and contribute to their confidence and effectiveness. Understanding these needs helps identify factors that affect teachers and provides insights on better supporting them in their role of teaching multi-grade classes.

Conceptual Framework

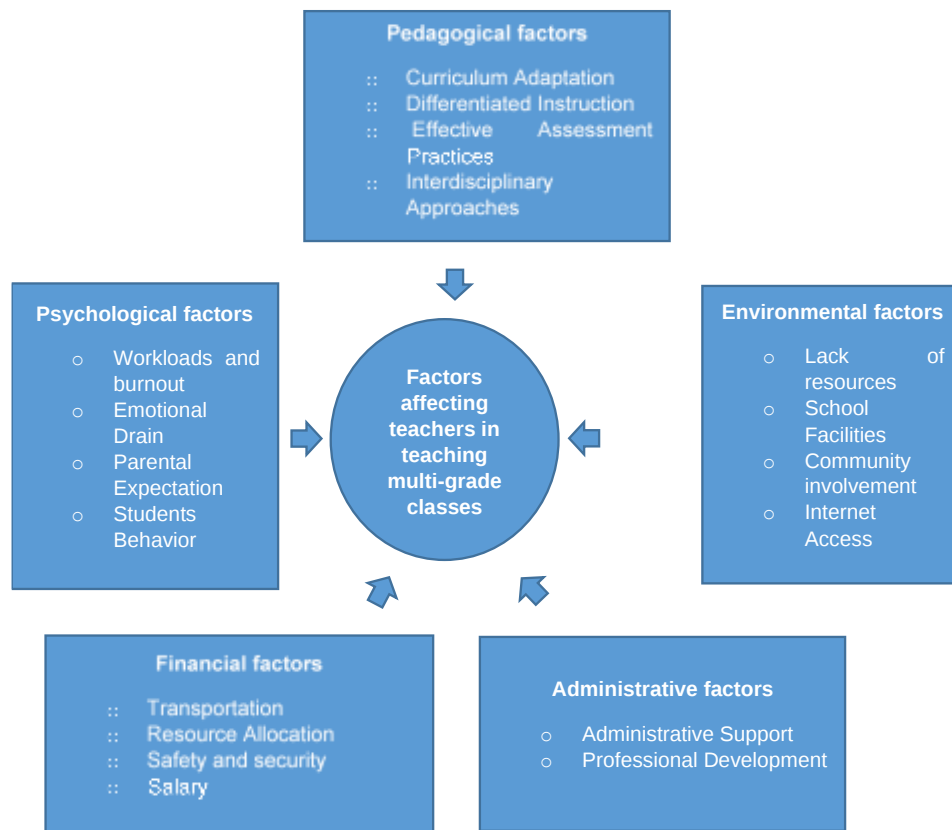


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework illustrating the diverse factors affecting teachers in teaching multi-grade classes

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that illustrates the diverse factors influencing teachers in the context of multi-grade teaching. These factors are grouped into five main domains: pedagogical, environmental, administrative, financial, and psychological. Each domain represents a category of challenges and support mechanisms that directly affect teachers' capacity to deliver quality education in multi-grade classrooms.

At the center of the framework is the dependent variable: factors affecting teachers in teaching multi-grade classes. This is surrounded by five independent variables that interact with and influence this core element.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researchers utilized a Qualitative Research Design. Qualitative research is a sort of investigation that investigated and provided deeper insights into real-world issues (Tenny et al., 2022). It was also characterized as the study of the nature of phenomena and was particularly suitable for answering questions of why something was not observed, examining complex different component mediation enhancement (Busetto et al., 2020).

Specifically, this study used a phenomenological research approach. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that sought to understand and portray the all-inclusive essence of a phenomenon (Delve. Ho, L., & Limpaecher, A. (2022)). In order to investigate various factors impacting teachers who teach multi-grade classes, this study utilized semi-structured interviews to collect data on these factors. In the end, thematic analysis was employed to uncover patterns, themes, and underlying meanings within the data.

Research Locale

This study was conducted with Combination class and Multi-grade teachers teaching Multi-grade classes from Diverse Elementary School Environments namely: Barangay Cag-ulango and Barangay Maybunga Balangiga, Barangay Cambilla Quinapondan, Barangay Tagpuro and Barangay Dalaragan Guiuan and Barangay San Isidro Lawaan Eastern Samar. There were two participants from each barangay who taught Combination and Multi-grade classes from Diverse Elementary School Environments. In total, twelve teachers participated in the study.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were the Combination and Multi-grade and Class teachers who taught Multi-grade classes from Diverse Elementary School Environments namely: Barangay Cag-ulango and Barangay Maybunga Balangiga, Barangay Cambilla Quinapondan, Barangay Tagpuro and Barangay Dalaragan Guiuan and Barangay San Isidro Lawaan Eastern Samar. The participants of the study which were included in the qualification were the Multi-grade and Combination class Teachers that had taught for five years and beyond.

Sampling Technique

This study utilized Purposive Sampling in order to explore diverse factors that affected Multi-Grade teachers in teaching. Moreover, Purposive Sampling techniques moved away from any arbitrary shape of examining and are procedures to form beyond any doubt that particular sorts of cases of those that may conceivably be included are part of the ultimate test within the inquire about consider. The reasons for receiving a purposive methodology were based on the presumption that given the points and destinations of the ponder, particular sorts of individuals may have held different and imperative sees about the thoughts and issues at address and thus got to be included within the test (Mason, 2022; Robinson, 2014; Trost, 1986).

Instrument of the Study

The instrument that was used to explore the diverse factors affecting teachers when teaching multi-grade classes would be semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary instrument for the data collection in phenomenology studies. These interviews allowed for an open-ended exploration of the respondents' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to teaching of multi-grade classes (Henriksen et al., 2021).

RESULTS

Theme 1: Resource Allocation Priorities

The resource allocation prioritized by the teachers in teaching multi-grade at various grade levels impacted the learning process in the multi-grade classes.

As stated by the Participants:

"In allocating resources such as visual aids, reading materials, and storybooks, I ensured those materials were suited to the learning needs of my pupils, especially those pupils who were struggling in reading" (P1 & P4).

"I also provided hands-on materials or activity-based materials that catered to the needs of my pupils" (P2 & P5).

Furthermore, grouping was one of the strategies for supporting the needs of the pupils that promoted inclusivity.

As the participants responded:

"I ensured giving differentiated activities to my pupils during the ongoing classes such as think-pair-share, matching type, and 4 pics 1 word" (P3).

In some cases, the teacher used their own pocket money to support classroom materials for teaching if the budget allowance for MOOE was not yet being released.

According to the participants:

"Whenever the MOOE budget was being delayed, I used my own pocket money just to support my need in teaching, just to make sure that my pupils were learning, such as bond paper, ink, and other printed materials which were very important for my effective instruction delivery" (P6).

"By budgeting, the allocation for instructional materials, pupils' school supplies, and other materials like bond papers and ink for printing and photocopying learning materials was determined." (P10)

"Through their MOOE fund, they were well provided with the resources that provided diverse materials catering to every learner. The Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) were utilized to support class expenses for instruction or delivering instruction in diverse grade levels, such as materials and supplies, transportation and travel, utilities, and classroom repairs. However, a challenge they sometimes faced was the delayed arrival of these funds, to the extent that they used their own pocket money to temporarily support their classroom needs." (P7)

Moreover, teachers supported some strategies by investing in tools and different resources that they thought would help them personalize the learning pathways of the pupils.

Theme 2: Influence by the environment factors to the learning process.

It was difficult for teachers across multi-grade levels to cope with teaching diverse classes due to problems like those associated with transporting to school.

This is what the participants expressed:

"Teaching in multi-grade classes was never easy for us multi-grade teachers. Based on our experiences, we encountered a lot of challenges influenced by the environment, specifically in transportation, because due to weather disturbances like heavy rainfall, we could not ride on "habal-habal" due to the slickness of the pathways we walked through to our school destination. (P1&P2)

"Sometimes, I failed to report to school when having heavy rainfalls, so there was no available "habal-habal" to carry me to school. I felt bad for my pupils for the wasted time and day, which was supposedly when I taught them something new for their learning, but weather disturbances were inevitable, so I had nothing to do about it". (P3)

Challenges did not only cover transportation factors that affected the pupils' learning development, but also arose due to slow internet connection, which contributed to the hindrance of the pupils' learning growth and development.

According to the participants' responses, they expressed that:

"Since we were teaching in remote areas, a problem with slow internet connection was what usually hindered my teaching process". (P4)

"Instead of making my discussion engaging, due to a lack of internet connection, I couldn't support my instructional activities, especially for the motivation part and grouping of my lesson, so I went back to applying the traditional way of teaching just to keep my pupils active. I had no choice but to download the printed materials and videos related to the lessons covered during the rest of the school days at home, where there was a strong internet connection". (P5&P6)

Furthermore, multi-grade teachers experienced the limited availability of teaching resources.

Theme 3: Pedagogical challenges that teachers face that impact the learning process

Multi-grade teachers encountered various challenges that affect their teaching process, which led to the progress of the pupils' learning development. As the participants responded that:

"Due to the diverse nature and interests of my pupils, I have come to struggle employing differentiated activities that suit their learning abilities." (P1)

"In my case, I only have 13 pupils of different ages and grade levels. So, it's a challenge for me to manage and discipline the pupils in the classroom." (P2)

"Sometimes, due to limited resources and empty pocket instances, and infrastructures in multi-grade classrooms hinder me from implementing engaging and interactive learning activities preferred for the pupils." (P3)

"For me, I need adequate training with pedagogical strategies to support my strategies in my teaching process in the classroom, which helps me become a more effective and efficient teacher." (P4)

"In our school in San Isidro elementary at Lawaan, the teachers who are attending seminars are just tend to be chosen few due to limited number of teachers, that is why others failed to have an opportunity to attend the training for pedagogical development lacked enough strategies and techniques to apply in our teaching process, especially because we are located at the most upstream remote area." (P5&P6)

Considering the various strategic plans in teaching, multi-grade teachers were able to creatively create unique approaches to address teaching issues that affects the learning level of the pupils.

The participants explained that:

"One of my strategies in teaching is giving real-life differentiated activities that focus on hands-on activities and problem solving that could enhance their critical thinking skills". (P7)

"I used to provide printed materials such as story books, learning modules for activities, and reading materials." (P8)

"In my teaching styles, I consider employing ICT integration to support my instruction for keeping my pupils engaged and being part of the lesson." (P9)

"For me, I consider the learning abilities level of my diverse learners to match the particular activities suited for their learning. Moreover, I strictly emphasize the consistency of my classroom management to have an organized and well-managed learning atmosphere in my classroom." (P10)

Theme 4: Training and professional development needs of multi-grade teachers in addressing the diverse needs of the pupils.

In multi-grade teaching, teachers are responsible for pupils from different grade levels in the same classroom, presents unique instructional challenge for multi-grade teachers. Due to this, participants need to acquire specific seminar workshops and training opportunities in enhancing their skills in teaching process which is essential for the pupils' academic success.

According the participants' data, it shows that:

"I attended workshop on multi-grade classroom management to improve time management in delivering my instruction and organizing lesson planning in dealing diverse pupils from different grade levels." (P1)

"In my experience, I have attended seminars on how to tailor lesson plan a varied learning styles within diverse learners. Moreover, it helped me how to integrate differentiated instructions to my pupils in order for them to learn based on their abilities suited to their learning levels." (P2&3)

"As a multi-grade teacher, I used my experience on acquired training to combine subjects across different grade levels in a single classroom where I maintained effective delivery of my lesson." (P4&P5)

"For me, as a multi-grade teacher, with the applied techniques and approaches from acquired trainings and information shared by my colleagues, it contributes my professional growth and understand the individual learning styles of my pupils." (P6&P7)

"Based on my teaching experience, I need more training and development on how I would be able to cope up such challenges to support the needs of my diverse learners." (P8)

Participants who attended seminars and workshops on professional development conduct self-evaluation efficacy to reflect on their delivery of instructions for improvements.

Based on the information given of the least participants, they affirm that:

"After my instruction, I tried to reflect on the result of my teaching experience through self-evaluation wherein it showcased weaknesses and strengths that I need to look forward for better improvements to obtain effective and efficient teaching experience." (P9)

"Self-evaluation helped me to reflect on something to improve on my teaching strategies to become more efficient teacher." (P10)

Theme 5: Financial Factors of the multi-grade teachers

Multi-grade teachers, particularly those assigned to remote areas, face a range of financial challenges. They often receive low salaries, have limited access to teaching resources, and lack adequate training for managing multi-grade classrooms. As a result, many are compelled to use personal funds to provide the necessary materials to sustain their classroom operations. This situation underscores the pressing realities and multiple challenges associated with multi-grade education, especially in the context of insufficient financial support and resource allocation.

As stated by the Participants:

"Usually, I spend some money from my pockets to buy simple, little materials to my learners. Although the government school may provide these, it can't do it 100% of the time, especially in a multigrade setup." (P1)

"There are times I end up saving money for my needs rather than printing out handouts. It's hard, but I want my students to have what they would need." (P2)

"Since my school is in a remote place, transportation costs a big chunk of my salary. Some days, I even prefer to walk just to save." (P3)

"We have more responsibilities than single-grade teachers, but we are still bound to that salary. It is so frustrating as it really is doubled for the work." (P4)

"I use my money to buy colored papers, markers, and visual aids. I just want my learners to have an engaging classroom, even if it costs me." (P5)

"It is a little demoralizing since we also have to chip in for school events such as classroom decorations or contests. It gets discouraging." (P6)

"Sometimes, I bring in snacks or some small prizes from home for my students. I know it's a little extra, but really every little bit counts in a multi-grade class." (P7)

"While we attend training and seminars, we already cater to the fare, food, and sometimes accommodation. This puts a lot of strain on one who is really budget tight." (P8)

"Making ends meet has been the hardest when the need of the classroom completely overshadows my own. I only wish that there are high hopes for more assistance targeted to multi-grade teachers like us." (P9)

"Multi-grade teaching demands so much—from time to energy to money. Sometimes I wonder whether anyone really understands just how much I give to keep my class afloat." (P10)

Multi-grade teachers frequently use their own funds for classroom necessities owing to insufficient support from the school. Such purchases can include classroom materials, prizes for pupils, and even training costs. The teachers also incur extra transportation costs in the case of individuals teaching in remote regions. Their salaries don't seem to have commensurate increases for the heavier burdens, putting extra financial strain on them and frustrating them.

Theme 6: Psychological factors of the multi-grade teachers

Multi-grade teachers experience various psychological factors such as stress and burnout due to workload, the need for adaptability and flexibility in managing diverse learners, intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy to maintain

effective teaching, job satisfaction influenced by support and school environment, strong time management skills to handle multiple responsibilities, and resilience to cope with daily challenge.

As stated by the Participants:

"Sometimes I feel so overwhelmed with managing different grades at the same time but still stay motivated because I want my students to learn and grow" (P1)

"It never really gets easy with the lessons that you're teaching for different grades, but I learned how to skillfully adapt and roll with it. I do, however, get quite tired at times, especially when there are no extra helping hands or when there just isn't enough time." (P2)

"I believe I can teach in a mixed-grade situation. It's not easy, but when I see my children learning, I feel accomplished in what I do." (P3)

"I love teaching, but that makes me battle on the hardest days. I just remind myself that these children need me, regardless of how tired I am." (P4)

"I have days when I feel like I am very burnt out with little things. But I guess I've learned to bounce back by talking to co-teachers or finding little victories with my students' progress." (P5)

"Just keep trying to keep a positive attitude and be flexible. Sometimes it gets frustrating when some of those materials are not available, but I just make the best of what I have and adjust as much as possible." (P6)

"For me, it's time management. I plan and stick to a program as much as I can. I also learned to trust myself more- I know I'm going to manage this setup." (P7)

"Honestly, tiring. I am often burnt out, especially after long days, yet I love teaching, and the support from my fellow teachers always has me getting through." (P8)

"Every day is different so it has demanded me to be very flexible; it hasn't always been easy, but I enjoy that I can help students from various levels learn together." (P9)

"It's a lot to handle, but I have developed a mentality of always looking for solutions. I try to be strong emotionally for my students and to take control of what I can." (P10)

In support of the above assertions, overwhelming emotional and mental burdens are brought on by juggling multiple grade levels, multimodal stress, burnout, and responsive time pressure. However, they also provide evidence of extreme adaptability, unlimited motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience, all rooted in a firm dedication to student learning and personal satisfaction in their teaching work.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative study explored the diverse factors that affect the ability of multi-grade teachers in remote elementary schools to deliver quality education during the school year 2023–2024. Grounded in phenomenological inquiry, the study revealed a complex interplay of pedagogical, environmental, financial, psychological, and professional development challenges that significantly influence the teaching and learning processes in multi-grade classrooms.

Findings from in-depth interviews with ten purposively selected teachers revealed that resource scarcity, including delayed government funding and insufficient instructional materials, compels teachers to finance their classrooms

personally. Environmental barriers, such as difficult access to schools, poor infrastructure, and limited internet connectivity, further disrupt the delivery of effective instruction. Pedagogically, teachers struggle with managing diverse learners, limited instructional time, and the absence of curriculum adjustments specific to multi-grade settings. Despite these constraints, many demonstrate resilience by employing innovative strategies such as differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, and the use of indigenous or recycled materials.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion presented in this study, suggestions were provided for future researchers who intend to explore this topic further.

1. Develop and implement specialized in-service training programs focused on differentiated instruction, multi-grade classroom management, integrated lesson planning, and social-emotional learning tailored to multi-grade settings.
2. Review and improve resource allocation systems to ensure timely provision of instructional materials and financial support, especially in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas.
3. Provide regular financial subsidies or teaching allowances specific to multi-grade teachers, acknowledging the additional workload and out-of-pocket expenses they incur. There should be enough classrooms to accommodate the number of students to ensure a safe learning environment.
4. Further research should be carried out in different contexts to explore the various factors influencing multi-grade teachers in multi-grade classroom settings.

FURTHER STUDY

These further studies would contribute valuable evidence to guide policymakers, education leaders, and practitioners in designing responsive interventions that address the complex realities of multi-grade teaching in remote and disadvantaged communities.

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