

# Lived Experiences of Multi-Grade Teachers in the Division of Iligan City

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**Abstract**— As multi grade teachers employ multiple efforts in teaching young learners it is undeniable that there are formidable challenges in the process of teaching and learning. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of multi-grade teachers in teaching multi-grade classrooms. This study utilized qualitative research method with phenomenological research design. There were a total of nine (9) participants in this study who shared their lived experiences through answering a researcher-made interview guide questionnaire. Based on the result of the gathered data, there were a total of 10 major themes that have emerged namely: Curriculum Management, Classroom Dynamics, Lack of Professional Development and support, Strategic planning and preparation, Collaboration and Seeking support, Professional Development and Continuous learning, Variety of teaching Methods/Strategies, Collaborative/peer Learning, Professional development and Training, Learning Materials. Moreover, there were two (2) sub theme emerged in curriculum management, namely; Differentiation and individualization and time management. The stories of multi-grade teachers present challenges and highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of teaching in classrooms with learners of varying ages and abilities. These educators demonstrate remarkable adaptability, creativity, and resilience in navigating the unique challenges posed by multi-grade settings. Ultimately, understanding and addressing the needs of multi-grade teachers is crucial for improving educational outcomes and creating inclusive learning environments.

**Keywords**— Challenges, Coping strategies, Multi-grade teachers, Multi-grade classrooms, Phenomenological.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic landscape of education, where classrooms often reflect the diversity of society, multi-grade teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the skills and academic futures of their learners. As multi grade teachers employ multiple efforts in developing literacy to their learners, it is undeniable that there are formidable challenges in the process of teaching and learning. Moreover, multi grade teachers juggle the diverse needs of learners across various age groups and literacy levels, necessitating innovative teaching methods such as differentiated instruction and peer learning. In addition, educators take on a distinctive journey that combines flexibility, creativity, and unshakable passion to building proficiency among their learners as they traverse the complexities of teaching leaners across many grade levels at the same time.

Multi-grade classes of developing countries are mainly open for learners to access primary education (Zavvar, et.al, 2022). Further, a multi-grade classroom is a special education in which students from at least two grades up to a maximum of six grades are present, led by one teacher (Mahdipour, 2018). The Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines, along its thrust of increasing access to quality elementary education, is strengthening the implementation of the Multi-grade Program in the Philippine Education (MPPE), (Brecio,

2023). This program addresses pressing concerns and issues on the provision of customized teaching and learning materials for multi-grade classes and professional development of teachers (DepEd, 2020). Since this nation is among those where the spread of its communities has resulted in a decline in the number of students and lacks trained educational professional for multi-grade classes, classrooms are held in many levels and normal teachers are assigned to teach multi-grade classes in order to give educational services. Thus, the planning and application of teaching, the process of assessment and class management in multi-grade classes are more complicated and difficult (Aksoy, 2017).

It becomes clear that multi-grade teachers have a critical and complex role in teaching. In DEPED, Division of Iligan City, the work of a multi-grade teacher involves not just only delivering instruction across multiple grade levels but also developing strategies to engage students with diverse literacy skills and backgrounds. In line with this, there is a lack of understanding of multi-grade teachers' journey in teaching in the multi-grade classroom, specifically, understanding teacher's personal narrative, emotional journeys and coping mechanisms. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how factors such as community support, professional development opportunities, and institutional policies influence their day-to-day experiences and overall well-

being. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing holistic support systems and tailored professional development programs that acknowledge and respond to the nuanced challenges and successes encountered by multi-grade teachers.

Thus, it is vital to see through the lens of multi grade teacher's lived experiences, this study will focus on the encountered challenges of the multi grade teachers, the coping mechanism that the multi grade teachers employed and the suggestions that the multi grade teachers recommend. Exploring the triumphs and challenges encountered by multi-grade teachers as the frontlines of multi-grade education from tailoring instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners to fostering a supportive classroom

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

The researcher used a qualitative research method with phenomenological research design in this study. The goal of qualitative research method and phenomenological research design is to understand the depths of human experiences through the descriptions provided by the respondents. Furthermore, Phenomenological research design of inquiry coming from philosophy in which the research describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants' (Creswell, 2014).

### *Research Participants*

The participants of this study were the nine (9) elementary teachers in the Dep.Ed Division of Iligan City. The participants were chosen using the purposive sampling method. According to Creswell & Plano,(2011), purposive sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individual that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest. In accordance with this, the participants were chosen based on the inclusion criteria set in this study, specifically; a.) teaching multi-grade classes for 3 or more years b.) employed at Dep.Ed Division of Iligan City and c.) teachers who are teaching in a combi class.

### *Research Setting*

The study was conducted at the Dep.Ed Division of Iligan City. The City of Iligan is located in the Northern coast of Mindanao facing Iligan Bay, bounded in the north by the province of Misamis Oriental, in the east by the province of Bukidnon and Lanao del Sur and in the south by the province of Lanao del Norte. The Dep.Ed

Division of Iligan City has a total of 97 elementary schools, out of 97 elementary schools there were 22 identified elementary schools which has multi grade classes.

### *Research Instrument*

This study utilized a semi-structured researcher-made interview guide questionnaire in gathering the data. It was focused on the lived experiences of multi-grade teachers in teaching multi-grade class.

### *Validation of Instrument*

Prior performing the interview, the researcher-made interview guide questionnaire was approved and checked by the research adviser, panel members, and two outside experts. After that, the researcher would appreciate any corrections or suggestions given.

### *Data Gathering Procedure*

Before the conduct of the study, the researcher asked for a consent to conduct the study to the Dep.Ed Division of Iligan City, specifically in the primary education. The researcher addressed the letters to the selected participants of the study. After given permission, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the selected participants and conducted the interview.

### *Data Analysis*

The researcher utilized Moustakas' (1994) Phenomenological Approach in summarizing and analyzing the data. The eight procedural steps was employed:

Horizontalizing. The researcher listed all relevant expressions found during the interview, considering each concept unique and of equal value. Reducing Experience/Responses. The researcher classified those identified horizons into themes. Thematic Clustering. The main goal of this step is to reduce the themes by clustering them according to how they may be interrelated. Comparing Multiple Data Sources. The themes will be identified from the participants shared views through interview, the shared views are compared to other methods such as observations, field notes and related literature to verify accuracy across data sources. Crafting Individual Textural Description of Participants. This step is summarization that includes verbatim quotes and excerpts from the participants. Constructing Individual Structural Description. This step is one of the processes in imaginative variation based on the constructed textural description and imaginative variation. Constructing Composite Structural Description. This step is one of the processes in

imaginative variation based on the constructed textural meaning. It will be added at the end of each paragraph to create a structural description. Synthesizing the Texture and Structure into an Expression. In this step, the researcher will start to combine the structural to get complete picture of the phenomenon

### **Ethical Consideration**

When it comes to interpreting participant shared experiences in qualitative research, ethical considerations are particularly important (Steffen, 2016). In this study, ethical considerations are based to the letter of Bryman and Bell (2017). Firstly, the participants of this study will not be harmed in any way. Secondly, the dignity of the participants is the top priority. Before the conduct of this study, the participants will be asked for their full consent. Lastly, the privacy of research participants, the appropriate, level of confidentiality of research data and the anonymity of individual's participating in the study were guaranteed.

Furthermore, deception and exaggeration about the study's goal and objectives will be avoided. Affiliations if any kind, funding resources and potential conflicts of interest will be declared. Finally, all research-related communications will be conducted with honesty and transparency and any misleading information or representation of primary data findings will be avoided.

## **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Curriculum Management**

Curriculum management encompasses various tasks and responsibilities aimed at ensuring that the curriculum meets educational standards, aligns with learning objectives, and effectively addresses the needs of students. Effective curriculum management is crucial for achieving educational excellence, fostering student success, however, balancing and aligning curriculum requirements for different grades within the same classroom poses challenges for multi-grade teachers. The interviewed participants have shared the following:

*“balancing curriculum requirements for different grade levels, adapting teaching strategies to diverse learning needs and managing classroom dynamics effectively” (P4)*

*“Actually, in the first years, it's hard for me to think or to make a lesson plan. How would I make two lessons for two grade levels in one setting?” (P5).*

In line with the review of related literature, multi grade teachers surely struggle with teaching learners, creating lesson plans, and creating documentation. This was substantiated by Ntombela's,(2021), in the study, it was observed that teachers lacked support in terms of providing a curriculum tailored for multi grade classes, leading to a need to adapt based on the various grade levels they handle. Teachers are required to juggle multiple curriculum guidelines and standards, which can be overwhelming and complex to plan and execute (Berry & Little, 2019). Moreover, this often involves creating multiple lesson plans and adapting instructional materials to meet the varied educational requirements of each grade level, which is both time-consuming and resource-intensive (Little, 2017). Ensuring that all students achieve the necessary competencies and learning outcomes for their specific grade while maintaining engagement and progression across all levels is a delicate balance (Miller, 2020). In addition, standardized curricula, often not designed with multi-grade settings in mind, can restrict teachers' flexibility to adapt content appropriately (Cornish, 2021). This lack of flexibility can hinder the ability to provide differentiated and individualized instruction, essential for catering to the diverse needs in multi-grade classrooms. The intricate task of curriculum management in this context highlights the need for more adaptable and inclusive curriculum designs that support effective teaching and learning in multi-grade settings (Veenman, 2021).

1.1. Differentiation and Individualization. Differentiation and individualization are two most important strategies in multi-grade teaching, as they address the diverse academic needs and learning paces of students across different grade levels within a single classroom. Further, as affirmed in the review of related literature, differentiated and individualized strategies are commonly employed in multi- grade classes. These strategies provide a unique way to cater to the students' individual needs and abilities while also enabling simultaneous activities (Recla & Potane 2023). Moreover, differentiation involves tailoring instruction, activities, and assessments to meet the varied readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles of students that helps address the individualized learning needs of learners. However, differentiation and individualization is seen as a challenge for multi-grade teachers due to the complexities of catering to a diverse group of students simultaneously. As interviewed, the participants shared:

*“Teaching multi-grade Class showed a unique set of challenges, for example, including meeting individualized learning needs.... doing differentiated instruction to cater to the different grade levels and learning abilities within the classroom (P1).*

*“One of the challenges that I have experienced in teaching multi-grade class is...the flexibility in making activities for the learners, we teachers need to think outside the box activities to make it more engaging” (P2).*

*“Teachers often use differentiated instruction, group activities and personalized learning approaches to meet the varied needs of learners” (P4).*

*“There are a lot, hahaha, so first is the diverse learning link, we even find it difficult to find in only one grade level how much more if two, we have to make sure that they understood the topic equally while having appropriate adaptation and attention.” (P9).*

As emerged as one of the sub-theme, differentiation and individualization presents a challenge in multi-grade teaching due to the need to cater to a diverse range of grade levels, learning styles, and paces within a single classroom. This task demands extensive preparation, making it difficult for teachers to manage alongside other responsibilities (Tomlinson, 2017). Moreover, effective classroom management becomes more complex as students engage in different tasks simultaneously, necessitating strong organizational skills (Subban & Round, 2019). Individualization compounds these challenges by requiring personalized attention and tailored learning plans for each student, which is particularly challenging in larger classes where the teacher-to-student ratio is high (Goodnough, 2018). Continuously assessing and providing feedback to students at different levels can be overwhelming, further complicating the teaching process (Gaitas & Alves, 2017). Ensuring that all students progress at their own pace without feeling isolated or disengaged adds another layer of complexity (Chowdhury, 2020).

1.2. Time Management. Time management involves the process of planning and organizing how much time you allocate to specific activities in order to maximize efficiency and productivity. It includes prioritizing tasks, setting goals, and creating schedules to ensure that deadlines are met and resources are used effectively. Effective time management allows individuals to achieve their objectives while minimizing stress and maintaining a balanced workload. Though, in the review

of related literature, asserted by Naparan and Alinsug, (2021), lack of time management is one of the main issues teachers have when teaching multi grade classes. In addition, Multi-grade teachers face difficulties in setting priorities for class instruction due to time limits and curriculum demands. As share by the participants:

*“Balancing time. Balancing time in teaching multi grade class” (P2).*

*“there’s a lot of challenges, the time, how to manage your time in teaching” (P5).*

*“One is, time allocation for everyday lessons in all subject areas is not enough for me” (P7).*

*“Third is Time management, it's hard to plan your lessons especially in lesson planning” (P9).*

Time management is one of the challenges in multi-grade teaching due to the need of effectively allocate instructional time across different grade levels and subjects within a single classroom. Teachers must simultaneously address the diverse academic needs of students at varying stages of development, which requires meticulous planning and organization (Little, 2017). This often involves preparing multiple lesson plans, differentiating instruction, and creating individualized learning activities, all of which are time-consuming tasks (Cornish, 2018).

Additionally, managing classroom activities so that all students remain engaged and on-task while working on different assignments adds another layer of complexity (Berry & Little, 2019). Teachers must be adept at multitasking and transitioning smoothly between activities to ensure that instructional time is used efficiently. Balancing whole-class instruction with small group or individual support is also challenging, as it requires careful scheduling to ensure that no students are left without guidance for extended periods (Chowdhury, 2020).

Furthermore, the administrative duties and assessments required for multiple grade levels can overwhelm teachers, leaving less time for instructional planning and direct interaction with students (Veenman, 2021). Effective time management in a multi-grade classroom demands a high level of organization, flexibility, and adaptability, highlighting the need for professional development and support to help teachers develop these essential skills.

## ***Classroom Dynamics***

Classroom dynamics refer to the complex interplay of social interactions, relationships, and behaviors that occur within a classroom setting. These dynamics are influenced by various factors, including the diverse personalities, backgrounds, and learning styles of students, as well as the teaching style and management approach of the educator. In multi-grade classrooms, managing dynamics can be particularly challenging due to the wide range of ages and abilities of learners in a single classroom. As shared by the participants in the interview:

*Third, is your learner, like, we are assigned in areas where you deal with learners of different ages with different social needs (P5).*

*The challenges that I have encountered in teaching multi-grade class is handling their behavior (P8).*

*Fourth is classroom management, they have different maturity level sometimes their behavior varies as well (P9).*

Classroom dynamics in multi-grade teaching is seen as a significant challenge as highlighted by the participants in the study. This is because of the complexities of managing students at different academic levels and developmental stages within a single classroom setting. These dynamics require teachers to balance varying educational needs, maintain discipline, and foster a collaborative learning environment, all of which can be overwhelming tasks (Little, 2019). The presence of diverse age groups and skill levels necessitates differentiated instruction and personalized learning plans, which can be time-consuming and difficult to implement effectively (Cornish, 2018). Moreover, another difficulty of teachers exists in managing classroom behavior in multi-grade settings. Younger students may require more attention and guidance, while older students might need more advanced materials and autonomy. Balancing these needs without causing disruptions or neglecting any group is a delicate task (Berry & Little, 2019). Furthermore, creating a classroom community where all students feel valued and included, despite their differences, is essential for a positive learning atmosphere (Pridmore, 2020).

Thus, effective classroom management in a multi-grade setting demands a high level of organization, flexibility, and creativity from teachers. Appropriate support systems are crucial in equipping teachers with the skills and strategies needed to handle these dynamics

successfully (Berry & Little, 2019). Despite the challenges, with the right approaches, teachers can create an inclusive and engaging learning environment that meets the needs of all students.

## ***Lack of Professional Development and Support***

Professional development and support are critical components in equipping teachers to handle the unique challenges of multi-grade teaching. This element plays an essential role in enhancing teachers' skills, knowledge, and confidence, enabling them to create effective and inclusive learning environments for students of varying ages and abilities. However, the participants in this study often highlighted the issue of lack of professional development and training indicating that teachers often enter multi-grade classrooms without adequate training or resources tailored to their unique instructional environment. As the participants shared in the following interview:

*“lack of seminars and training for teachers teaching multi-grade classes” (P3).*

*“So, that's the puzzle for me, because of course when I entered DEPED there is no specific training in teaching multi-grade” P5.*

*“Next is, lack of specialized or intensive training or seminar regarding with teaching multi-grade class, every year education has evolve and we have diverse learners” (P7).*

*“Another challenge is that there is lack of teacher's training or seminar to update teachers especially in the multi-grade.” (P8)*

The lack of professional development is particularly problematic because multi-grade teaching demands a different set of skills compared to single-grade classrooms. As shared by participant 3,5,7 and 8, teachers must be proficient in differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, and behavior management across a wide range of ages and abilities. Further, research underscores the importance of targeted professional development in improving multi-grade teaching outcomes. According to a study by Little (2006), teachers in multi-grade settings who received specialized training were better equipped to implement differentiated instruction and manage classroom dynamics effectively. Additionally, Mulryan-Kyne (2007) found that ongoing professional development and support were crucial for teachers to adapt to the

multi-grade classroom's demands and enhance student learning outcomes.

On the other hand, participants have also experienced handling multi-grade class as a first timer. In the study of (Doğan, Çapan, & Cığerci, 2020; Tutt, 2019), they highlighted challenges of multi-grade teachers as first timers, when these teachers were hired and given multi-grade classrooms to teach, they were not prepared to face the situation. As a result, some multi-grade teachers exhibited low self-efficacy than mono-grade teachers. The need for professional development is also linked to teacher morale and job satisfaction. Without adequate support, teachers can feel overwhelmed and isolated, leading to burnout and reduced effectiveness in the classroom.

Addressing the lack of professional development and support is essential for strengthening multi-grade teaching. By investing in targeted training programs and ongoing professional development opportunities, educational institutions can empower teachers to navigate the complexities of multi-grade classrooms, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes for all students.

### **Strategic Planning and Preparation**

Strategic planning and preparation is a systematic process of setting long-term goals, determining the activities needed to achieve the set goals, and allocating the necessary resources to execute the actions effectively. This process is fundamental especially in the education setting. In this study, multi-grade teachers emphasize the importance of developing individualized learning plans to monitor progress and provide targeted support, ensuring each learner's academic development amidst the challenges present in a multi-grade classroom. Five (5) out of the nine (9) participants have shared the same coping strategies in teaching multi-grade classroom, the following are the participants' views:

*"How did I cope up?, hmmm I think that It really helps if I plan well my instruction. Specifically, preparing Individualized Learning Plans: Developing individualized learning plans for each learner can help monitor their progress, portray personalized goals, and give aimed support where needed" (P1).*

*"I coped up the challenges by using differentiated instruction to tailor my lessons and activities to meet the varied learning needs of learners at different grade levels. I also use collaboration and peer learning to*

*encourage among learners of different grade level where older students can mentor younger ones" (P4).*

*"By implementing cross strategies inside multi-grade teaching, while ensuring that all learners received proper education" (P6).*

*"In Kindergarten, I will give an activity before going to another grade level. After discussing the Grade 1, I will give an activity, it can be a group activity and then I will move on to the Kindergarten, and will discuss with them while grade 1 is having activity, I do this vice versa everyday" (P8).*

*"I cope by approaching strategic approach so basically in simple words you have to learn how to manage in coping these challenges, I engage more in collaborative activities, not only will it enhance their learning it will also enhance their social interactions" (P9).*

This approach has been helpful to multi-grade teachers in coping with some of the challenges faced. Setting clear, achievable goals and systematically planning the steps to meet those goals, considering the unique challenges of teaching learners of varying ages and abilities simultaneously. Research has shown that effective strategic planning helps teachers manage their classrooms more efficiently, ensuring that all students receive the attention and support they need to succeed (Mulryan-Kyne, 2016). Moreover, one critical aspect of strategic planning is the development of differentiated instruction strategies tailored to meet the individual needs of each student. Differentiated instruction involves varying teaching methods and materials to accommodate different learning styles and levels of readiness within the same classroom. This approach has been found to be particularly effective in multi-grade settings, as it allows teachers to provide personalized learning experiences that cater to the diverse academic and developmental needs of their students (Tomlinson & Moon, 2017).

Strategic planning and preparation provide a structured and effective coping strategy for teachers in multi-grade classrooms.

By setting clear goals, differentiating instruction, prioritizing resource allocation, and engaging in continuous reflection and adjustment, teachers can manage the complexities of their teaching environment more effectively. This approach not only helps to reduce stress and improve teacher efficacy but also leads to better educational outcomes for multi-grade learners.

## ***Collaboration and Seeking support***

Collaboration and seeking support are essential strategies for teachers managing the challenges of multi-grade classrooms. These approaches provide invaluable assistance, resources, and emotional support, contributing significantly to the effectiveness and well-being of educators. Collaboration involves working with colleague to share insights, while seeking support encompasses leveraging available professional development opportunities, administrative backing, and external expertise.

*“Ask an advice or help to those who have a long experience in the field to develop effective teaching, in sharing ideas and resources it can help to alleviate challenges” (P2)*

*“Ask for guidance from my colleagues” (P3).*

*“Next is I would ask help from my co-workers, sometimes two heads is better than one man gyud that is why sometimes I ask them if okay ba ni na strat or dili” (P6).*

*“I would ask help from my co-teachers and from the principal” (P7).*

Collaboration among teachers is particularly beneficial in multi-grade settings. By working together, teachers can share lesson plans, teaching materials, and best practices tailored to multi-grade classrooms. This peer-to-peer exchange fosters a collaborative learning environment where teachers can learn from each other's experiences and expertise. Research has shown that teachers who engage in collaborative practices are better equipped to handle diverse classroom challenges and can provide more effective instruction (Vangrieken et al., 2017). For example, teachers can co-develop interdisciplinary projects that cater to different grade levels or create rotational teaching schedules to manage classroom dynamics more efficiently.

Collaboration and seeking support are indispensable strategies for teachers in multi-grade classrooms. By adopting a collaborative culture among educators, teachers can enhance their instructional practices and better meet the diverse needs of their students. These coping strategy not only improve educational outcomes but also contribute to a more sustainable and fulfilling teaching experience. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, the importance of collaboration and support in multi-grade teaching will remain a cornerstone of effective education

## Professional Development and Continuous learning

Professional development and continuous learning are essential for teachers, especially in the demanding concept of multi-grade classrooms. These strategies ensure that educators remain updated with the latest pedagogical techniques, adapt to evolving educational standards, and meet the diverse needs of their students effectively. By engaging in professional development and continuous learning, teachers can enhance their instructional practices, improve student outcomes, and foster a more dynamic and responsive learning environment. Commonly, participants have shared the similar views on professional development as their coping strategy:

*“Aside from advices, I also look into seminars to help me widen my knowledge better in teaching multi-grade”( P2).*

*“I attend seminars or training so that I can gain more knowledge”(P3).*

*“And another thing that is most effective one is Seminar, Multi grade seminar, it is a big help there that we understand based on demonstration and experience of other multi-grade teachers, so lessons that are passed based on those old experiences of those who have done their demonstration” (P5).*

*“The next coping strategy is probably having to attend a seminar or training, I think it will give knowledge to the teacher especially to the multi-grade teachers” (P7).*

As shared by the participants, one of their coping strategy is attending training or in other words professional development. Professional development structures training programs, workshops, seminars, and courses designed to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills. In multi-grade teaching, professional development is particularly vital as it equips teachers with strategies to manage the complexities of teaching students of different ages and abilities simultaneously. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), effective professional development is characterized by its focus on content knowledge, incorporation of active learning, coherence with school curricula and policies, sufficient duration, and opportunities for collective participation. These elements ensure that teachers can apply what they learn directly to their classroom practices. Continuous learning, on the other hand, is the ongoing process of

acquiring new knowledge and skills throughout one's career. This can take various forms, including self-directed learning, attending conferences, participating in professional learning communities, and pursuing advanced degrees or certifications. Additionally, continuous learning is essential for teachers to stay current with the latest educational research, technological advancements, and innovative teaching methods. In the context of multi-grade teaching, continuous learning allows educators to refine their instructional strategies and discover new resources.

The impact of professional development and continuous learning on teacher effectiveness and student outcomes is well-documented. For instance, a study by Desimone and Garet (2015) found that teachers who participate in high-quality professional development demonstrate improved instructional practices and greater student achievement gains. Similarly, continuous learning fosters a growth mindset among teachers, encouraging them to be reflective practitioners who continuously seek to improve their teaching. This reflective practice is particularly important in multi-grade classrooms, where the ability to adapt and innovate is crucial for meeting the diverse needs of students.

#### **Variety of teaching Methods/Strategies**

The use of varied methods and strategies in teaching is essential especially in a multi-grade setting. This also includes differentiated instruction in the teaching and learning process. Differentiated instructional refers to those strategies and activities which a teacher is using in class according to the capability and needs of students. In the study of Bajpai & Pandey, (2023) they asserted that in multi-grade classroom teacher should use differentiated instruction to demonstrate according to the needs, interest in learning styles of their students. Further, differentiated instructional refers to those strategies and activities which a teacher is using in class according to the capability and needs of students. In this study

*“My suggestion would be that the teacher should do a differentiated instruction” (P1)*

*“Use variety of teaching methods” (P2)*

*“My suggestion would be that teacher should start using differentiated instruction to tailor my lessons and activities to meet the varied learning needs of learners at different grade levels” (P4)*

*“By implementing cross strategies inside multi-grade teaching, while ensuring that all learners received proper education”, (P6)*

In following narratives, multi-grade teachers have used differentiated instruction according to the learning style or according to the capabilities of their students at which they learn with their pace. It will engage students and also help in classroom management. In several research studies the findings contribute to learning theories on differentiated instruction and social interaction (Tomlinson, et al., 2003). In other studies of Cornish, (2009), Gnadinger, (2008), revealed that in modern era multi-grade classrooms, the basic philosophy of classroom organization. In research studies of Many and Henderson, (2005), Dewey, (1916), Vygotsky, (1998), Fosco, et al., (2004), Wood and Frid, (2005), Fawcett and Garton 2005), Geisler, et al., (2009), Reis, et al., (2011), Stuart, et al., (2006), Cornish, (2009), Gnadinger, (2008), Chick, (2006), Swenson and Strough, (2008), the finding in the theoretical basis that student learn best through differential instruction and social interaction.

#### **Collaborative/Peer Learning**

Collaborative learning is a form of group learning where students interact to each other to solve a specific problem or completing a task to find solution for certain problems. It is also called as team learning where students work together. It includes peer tutoring teacher can Group a class according to their abilities and capabilities and they learn together. In another way teacher can pair a fast learner student to a slow learner so that fast learner can scaffold the slow learner in learning. It leads to a variety of creativity in doing exercises. Students learn in better way by the peers this strategy is very useful in multigrade teaching, (Bajpai & Pandey, 2023). As interviewed, participants have shared the following:

*“flexible grouping in teaching multi-grade class to cater learner's needs” (P1)*

*“I also use collaboration and peer learning to encourage among learners of different grade level where older students can mentor younger ones”, (P4)*

*“Number one, in the above 30 number of learners, they should be arranged on what day that group of learners will come to school, so that learning for them can be meaningful and exciting” ( P7)*



Studies have shown that students who participate in collaborative activities demonstrate improved academic achievement, critical thinking skills, and positive attitudes towards learning (Roseth et al., 2008). Moreso, research carried out by Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher (2015) states that flexible grouping strategies, fairly distributed time management and successful organization had a significant impact on student learning in multi-grade classes. This study also identified two types of peer tutoring; spontaneous peer tutoring and guided peer tutoring. Teachers describe peer tutoring as ‘helpful and cooperative and feel that situations where older students help younger students as very important (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015).

In implementing collaborative learning strategies in multi-grade teaching, teachers can structure activities that encourage peer interaction and collaboration. For example, group projects that require students to research, problem-solve, and present findings together can be beneficial. Teachers can also facilitate peer tutoring sessions where older students assist younger ones in understanding challenging concepts or completing assignments.

### **Implement Professional Development and Training**

Professional development and training refers to the process of improving and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and competencies of professionals, typically within their field of work. In the context of education, professional development is crucial for teachers and educators to stay abreast of current research, best practices, and innovations in teaching and learning. It encompasses various activities such as workshops, seminars, courses, conferences, collaborative learning communities, and self-directed learning initiatives aimed at supporting continuous improvement in instructional practices and student outcomes. Professional development helps educators adapt to new challenges, refine their teaching methods, and maintain high standards of professional excellence throughout their careers.

*“My suggestions would be; teachers should have proper training seminars to teachers based on the real setting of the classroom” (P3)*

*“Well, I was thinking that providing more seminars and trainings for teachers is a must” (P5)*

*“Then, another is, there should be efficient training in making instructional materials by grading period” (P7)*

*“I would say that the best thing to strengthen is that they should open more trainings and then materials in teaching the multi-grade” (P8)*

*“My suggestion, is seek professional development, in this kind of situations, we need training, more seminars for us multi-grade teachers to gain more knowledge on how we can handle multi-grade better” (P9)*

As suggested by the participants, providing professional development opportunities can help teachers feel more confident and capable, fostering a positive teaching environment that benefits both educators and students. Professional development supports educators in staying current with research-based practices and innovations in education. It enables teachers to deepen their understanding of pedagogical theories, instructional strategies, and curriculum development. For instance, workshops and seminars often provide opportunities for teachers to learn about new teaching methods, technology integration, assessment techniques, and classroom management strategies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Moreover, professional development fosters reflective practice among educators, encouraging them to critically evaluate their teaching methods and make informed decisions about instructional approaches. By engaging in reflective activities such as action research, collaborative lesson planning, and peer observations, teachers can assess the impact of their teaching practices on student learning outcomes (Sawchuk, 2014). This reflective process promotes professional growth and encourages teachers to continuously refine their instructional strategies to better meet the needs of their students.

Furthermore, training programs address specific skills or knowledge gaps that are essential for effective teaching. By acquiring targeted training, educators can develop expertise in areas critical to their teaching responsibilities and better support the diverse needs of their students (Guskey, 2014).

By investing in ongoing learning opportunities, schools and districts can empower teachers to enhance their instructional practices, adapt to educational advancements, and ultimately improve student achievement.

The continuous pursuit of professional development ensures that educators remain engaged, motivated, and well-prepared to meet the evolving demands of modern education.

## ***Provide Learning Materials***

Learning materials in the context of education refer to resources, tools, and instructional aids used by teachers to facilitate learning experiences for students. These tools are selected and adapted by teachers to better aid teaching and learning process. Further, learning materials can take various forms, including textbooks, workbooks, worksheets, digital resources, manipulatives, visual aids, multimedia presentations, and educational games. These materials are essential tools for strengthening multi-grade teaching by providing support for differentiated instruction, addressing diverse learning needs, and enhancing engagement across various grade levels. Four (4) out the nine (9) have mentioned about the significance of learning materials in strengthening the multi-grade teaching.

*“materials to accommodate different learning styles and abilities” (P2)*

*“Provide vast array of learning materials that can be used for catering Multiple intelligences” (P3)*

*“the teachers must be provided with a ready-made learning materials and lesson plans for the multi-grade class” (P7)*

*“another suggestion is they should make more materials a separate book/materials for multi-grade so that teaching can be much more easy and affective to these kids” (P9)*

Learning materials are fundamental tools for implementing differentiated instruction in multi-grade classrooms. According to Tomlinson (2017), differentiated instruction involves tailoring teaching methods, content, and resources to meet the individual learning needs of students. Learning materials can be adapted to provide varying levels of challenge and support, ensuring that students at different grade levels can access content at their appropriate instructional level (Tomlinson, 2017). Moreover, well-designed learning materials contribute to increased student engagement and motivation in multi-grade classrooms. Roseth et al. (2018) emphasize that interactive and visually appealing materials, such as digital simulations, educational games, and multimedia resources, can capture students' interest and make learning more enjoyable and meaningful. This engagement is crucial in multi-grade settings where students may have varying interests and learning preferences (Roseth et al., 2018). Learning materials facilitate active learning experiences that

encourage students to construct their own understanding of concepts through exploration and hands-on activities. For instance, manipulatives in mathematics or science kits allow students to manipulate objects and conduct experiments, promoting deeper conceptual understanding across different age groups (Johnson & Johnson, 2019).

Essence: The essence of the study explores the lived experiences of multi-grade teachers, capturing the unique challenges and rewards they encounter in managing classrooms with students of varying ages and academic levels. Through qualitative exploration, the study uncovers the strategies teachers employ to address the diverse educational needs within these settings, including differentiated instruction, classroom management, and fostering peer learning. It also highlights the emotional and professional resilience required to navigate the complexities of multi-grade teaching, as well as the support systems and professional development opportunities that can enhance multi-grade teacher's effectiveness. By focusing on the personal narratives of multi-grade teachers, the study provides deeper understanding of the realities multi-grade teachers face and inform policies and practices that can better support multi-grade teachers.

## **CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study on the lived experiences of multi-grade teachers highlights the complexity and diversity inherent in teaching learners of varying ages and abilities within a single classroom. Multi-grade teachers exhibit exceptional adaptability, creativity, and resilience as they navigate these unique challenges. The findings underscore the necessity of comprehensive professional development, robust institutional support, and collaborative linkages to foster effective teaching practices. Moreover, addressing the needs of multi-grade teachers is crucial for improving educational outcomes and creating inclusive learning environments.

To enhance multi-grade instruction, several recommendations are proposed. Multi-grade teachers are encouraged to reflect on and adopt effective coping strategies while pursuing continuous professional development through seminars and training programs. School administrators should organize workshops focusing on curriculum management, differentiated instruction, and classroom management tailored to multi-grade settings. The Department of Education, Division Iligan City, is urged to design training programs and policies that address the specific

challenges of multi-grade teaching, ensuring these are supported with adequate resources. Additionally, future researchers should explore and evaluate innovative strategies, such as differentiated instruction and technology integration, to enhance teaching effectiveness in multi-grade classrooms.

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