

## From theory to practice: Narratives of multigrade teachers in Cervantes, Ilocos Sur

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### **Abstract**

Multigrade classrooms, where a single teacher is responsible for teaching multiple grade levels in one room, are common in rural and underserved areas. These settings present unique challenges, as teachers are tasked with managing diverse learning needs, varying curriculum requirements, and limited resources. This study investigates the narratives, teaching practices, and training needs of multigrade teachers in Cervantes, Ilocos Sur. Using a qualitative research design, data was collected through verbal and written interviews with nine (9) multigrade teachers, guided by an aide-memoire. Transcriptions were analyzed using cool and warm analyses. From the themes emerged the acronym MULTIGRADE MAGIC, capturing key dimensions of multigrade teaching: **M**astering Distance, **U**nleashing Reflective Growth, **L**eading with Resilience and Creativity, **T**ailoring Lessons, **I**gniting Peer Tutoring and Collaboration, **G**enerating Thematic Learning, **R**efining Time Management, **A**dapting Tailored Lessons for Multi-Level Learners, **D**efining Management Strategies, **E**mpowering Resourcefulness, **M**eeting Training Gaps, **A**ctivating Technology to Bring Lessons to Life, **G**rounding Teaching Contextualized Practices, **I**nnovating Instructional Delivery, and **C**ultivating Collaboration. A contextualized, staggered training design was crafted in response, emphasizing differentiated instruction, time management, contextual planning, and digital integration—delivered through workshops, mentoring, and peer support. The study recommends institutionalizing reflective spaces like peer learning communities, incorporating feedback loops such as action research, and creating teaching resources tailored to multigrade contexts. Future research should examine the long-term impact of such training programs and explore how collaboration and technology can improve teaching quality in resource-limited, multigrade environments.

**Keywords:** multigrade classrooms, training design, differentiated instruction, teacher training, classroom management

## From theory to practice: Narratives of multigrade teachers in Cervantes, Ilocos Sur

### 1. Introduction

Multigrade teaching embodies both challenges and opportunities. It requires a teacher to be adaptable, creative, and resourceful, managing diverse learners within a single classroom setting. While it presents complexities in instruction and classroom management, it also fosters a unique environment where peer learning and collaboration can thrive. This teaching model, though demanding, holds the potential to deliver quality education in areas where traditional single-grade classrooms are not feasible. Multigrade teaching refers to the instructional practice where a single teacher educates students across multiple grade levels within one classroom. This approach often arises in rural or remote areas where student populations are insufficient to warrant separate classes for each grade level (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007). Factors such as limited teacher availability, inadequate infrastructure, and dispersed populations contribute to the adoption of multigrade teaching as a pragmatic solution to ensure educational access for all children.

The significance of multigrade teaching lies in its ability to provide continuous education in underserved regions. It ensures that children in isolated communities receive instruction despite logistical and resource constraints. Moreover, multigrade classrooms can promote individualized learning, peer tutoring, and a sense of community among students of varying ages and abilities (Jordaan, 2006). Globally, multigrade teaching is recognized as a viable strategy to address educational disparities in remote and low-population areas. Countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia implement multigrade classrooms to maximize limited resources and reach marginalized populations. According to Little (2001), multigrade settings can yield positive educational outcomes when supported by strong training and resource frameworks. These settings often promote collaborative learning and improved student engagement when implemented effectively.

In the Philippines, multigrade teaching is prevalent in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. The Department of Education (DepEd, 2012) recognizes multigrade classes as an effective modality to increase access to basic education. Initiatives such as the provision of specialized training programs and multigrade learning materials have been introduced to support these unique learning environments. However, challenges persist, including limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and the complex demands of handling diverse learners simultaneously (Mirando, 2012). Several studies have explored the experiences of multigrade teachers in the Philippines. Lapuz (2015) found that teachers face difficulties in planning, classroom management, and instructional delivery due to the varying levels of learners in one setting. In their systematic review, Reclla and Potane (2024) emphasized how teachers cope through strategies such as peer tutoring and thematic instruction, despite the absence of multigrade-specific training. Similarly, Sercola (2024) and Rondero and Casupanan (2024) noted that multigrade teachers in far-flung schools exhibit remarkable creativity and resilience, although they often struggle with access to materials and technological resources.

Research on training teachers for teaching multi-grades uncovers major deficiencies, especially in terms of successful teaching methods and continuous professional growth. Although research highlights the specific difficulties teachers encounter, like adapting teaching and using different assessment techniques (Baker *et al.*, 2022), there is not enough focus on specific training programs designed for these situations. Research shows that new teachers often lack the necessary skills to cater to various student needs and adjust instruction accordingly, but there is limited research on training programs designed to tackle these issues. Furthermore, the impact of socio-cultural aspects on teacher confidence in multi-grade environments has not been thoroughly explored (Fitzgerald, *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, there is a lack of research to guide optimal strategies (Smith & Johnson, 2023). Furthermore, few research on field experiences in training new teachers for multi-grade environments (Martines, & Lopez, 2024). While previous research highlights the significance of personalized teaching methods and behavior management techniques for various learners, there is a lack of investigation into

educational frameworks that can help new educators thrive in such diverse settings (Jones & Clark, 2023). Improving these shortcomings could greatly improve teacher performance and student education in multi-grade classrooms.

Multi-grade education is prevalent in Cervantes, a municipality in Ilocos Sur. Preliminary observations suggest that multigrade teachers in Cervantes navigate complex instructional scenarios, often improvising materials and methodologies to meet their students' needs. The interplay of various dialects, limited access to instructional materials, and the geographical isolation of schools further complicate their teaching environment. These factors underscore the need for a deeper, localized exploration of their lived experiences. This study aims to fill the identified gap by examining the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in Cervantes, Ilocos Sur. Through narrative analysis, it seeks to uncover the challenges they face, the strategies they employ, and the support systems they require. The findings are expected to inform practice and policy, contribute to theory, and guide the development of training interventions for multigrade teachers working in similar rural settings.

***Statement of the Problem*** - This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of multi-grade teachers in Cervantes, Ilocos Sur. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- What narratives do teachers share in teaching multi-grade classrooms?
- What teaching practices are reflected in the narratives of teachers?
- How do these narratives influence their teaching practice?
- What training needs are reflected in the narratives of teachers?
- What valid training design can be developed for multi-grade teachers?

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research approach using narrative design to explore the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in Cervantes, Ilocos Sur. Narrative inquiry allowed for the collection of rich, contextual data through storytelling, highlighting teachers' personal and professional journeys. A total of nine in-service multigrade teachers, selected through purposive sampling, participated in face-to-face interviews or provided written responses. Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview guide focused on teacher narratives, instructional practices, and challenges. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, was used to identify patterns and develop core themes. Member checking, peer validation, and triangulation ensured trustworthiness and credibility. To validate the proposed training design based on the findings, a descriptive analysis with mean scoring was applied, using a 4-point scale to determine the validity of each component. The content validity checklist was adapted from the study of Azarias (2022). Ethical standards were rigorously observed throughout the study, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and respectful engagement with all participants.

## **3. Discussion**

### *3.1 Narratives of Multigrade Teachers*

The narratives of multigrade teachers in Cervantes, Ilocos Sur, revealed the intricate balancing act they perform daily to ensure effective learning despite the challenges of managing multiple grade levels within a single classroom. These stories underscore not only the professional demands of multigrade teaching but also the personal growth it inspires. Through their lived experiences, themes such as Mastering Distance, Unleashing Reflective Growth, and Leading with Resilience, Creativity, and Purpose in Multigrade Teaching emerge—painting a vivid picture of educators who adapt, reflect, and reinvent traditional methods to bridge

learning gaps and cultivate learners' engagement. These narratives highlight the enduring commitment of multigrade teachers to create meaningful learning experiences, even in the most complex and resource-constrained environments.

**Mastering Distance.** From the sharing of the participants, they highlighted that their daily or weekly journeys to geographically isolated schools in Cervantes are not only physically demanding but emotionally taxing. This theme captures the extraordinary efforts teachers exert in overcoming natural barriers, the sacrifices they make to leave home and comfort behind, and the enduring spirit they demonstrate in reaching learners situated in far-flung areas. These teachers face rough roads, long travel hours, and harsh conditions—not just as a routine, but as a reality deeply embedded in their profession.

Participants shared vivid accounts of their travel routines:

*“My typical day starts very early. Since I’m away from home, I wake up before dawn to prepare for the day. I commute to school, which takes about 45 minutes, and I use that time to mentally review my lesson plans.” (P1)*

*“I wake up very early on Monday to catch the first trip going to school, which takes around two hours.” (P2)*

*“My day starts early. I leave home at around 6:00 AM and ride my motorcycle for 45 minutes to get to school. The ride is tiring, but I’ve gotten used to it over the years.” (P3)*

*“My week starts early every Monday. I leave home before sunrise, traveling about 45 minutes by motorcycle to get to school.” (P5)*

*“I wake up before dawn to prepare for a two-hour motorcycle ride along rough, dusty roads. Once I reach the drop-off point, I walk for another two hours through uneven terrain, crossing streams and narrow paths to reach my school.” (P7)*

*“When I was first assigned to a multigrade school in a far-flung area, my day would start very early. After traveling by motorcycle for hours, I had to walk for another two hours through rough, muddy trails just to reach the school.” (P8)*

These accounts highlight the immense effort required of teachers to reach their schools. Traveling through dusty roads, muddy trails, or across rivers, they arrive already tired but begin their day setting up classrooms and preparing materials for multiple grade levels. The physical and emotional strain is undeniable, yet their commitment to their learners and their role as educators pushes them to continue. These teachers exemplify not only endurance but also deep devotion to their vocation. The constant fatigue from such long and treacherous travel can significantly affect teachers' health, motivation, and instructional quality. Teachers have limited time for rest, lesson planning, or professional development. Their safety is also at risk, especially during harsh weather conditions. These insights signal a pressing need for systemic support—transportation aid, accessible housing near schools, and recognition of hardship posts are necessary measures to alleviate their burdens and retain dedicated educators in remote areas.

The difficulties encountered by these teachers align with the findings of Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), who emphasized that teachers in isolated postings often face extreme physical and emotional hardships due to the lack of infrastructure and institutional support. Similarly, Rondero and Casupanan (2024) documented similar stories of teachers who travel long hours and endure harsh conditions, highlighting the resilience and commitment required to continue teaching in such settings. Lapuz (2015) further explained that the physical toll of commuting to remote schools contributes to teacher burnout and can threaten the sustainability of quality education in rural areas. Castigador (2019) also noted that teachers working in geographically challenged areas often go beyond the call of duty, sacrificing personal time, comfort, and even finances to ensure their students

receive basic education. Similarly, Msimanga (2019) pointed out that such hardships are not isolated experiences, but a systemic issue faced by rural multigrade teachers in various developing regions, particularly in areas with poor road conditions and limited access to basic utilities.

**Unleashing Reflective Growth.** Based on the participants' narratives, it was evident that despite the exhausting demands of teaching in multigrade classrooms, they consistently carve out time for intentional reflection to improve their instructional practices. This theme captures the deep-seated habit of self-assessment that these educators employ to enhance their effectiveness and respond more adeptly to their learners' diverse needs. Their reflections are not simply routine but represent a purposeful drive toward continuous personal and professional development.

Participants expressed how they incorporate reflection into their daily routines:

*“By the time the day ends, I’m physically and mentally exhausted, but I always take a moment to reflect on what went well and what I can improve for the next day.” (P1)*

*“After classes, I review student work, prepare materials for the next day, and reflect on what strategies worked.” (P3)*

*“After classes, I review student work, prepare materials for the next day, and reflect on what strategies worked. This routine continues until Friday when I finally head back home.” (P5)*

*“At the end of the day, I reflect on whether my approach was effective and plan how I can improve my teaching for the next day.” (P6)*

*“After class, I spend time reflecting on what worked well and adjusting my strategies to improve learning outcomes the next day.” (P9)*

These reflections are not passive thoughts but active efforts to refine classroom practice. Teachers examine student performance, recall the flow of instruction, and evaluate student engagement to make necessary adjustments. This habit of introspection allows them to respond more effectively to the varied needs of their learners, especially in a setting where learners are at different developmental and academic levels. Through this process, they develop better pacing, find more suitable strategies, and build confidence in their roles. Regular reflection encourages teachers to become adaptive, intentional educators who are not just reactive to classroom difficulties but proactive in solving them. This practice leads to more responsive lesson planning, improved classroom management, and higher student achievement over time. In a multigrade setting—where one-size-fits-all instruction is not possible—this flexibility is essential for fostering an inclusive and effective learning environment. Furthermore, reflective teaching promotes self-efficacy, helping teachers navigate burnout and sustain their passion for teaching despite the taxing workload. These practices are supported by research. Sercola (2024) emphasized that reflection helps teachers in rural multigrade classrooms recalibrate their methods, ultimately improving student learning outcomes. Lapuz (2015) highlighted that reflective teaching nurtures adaptability, allowing teachers to tailor their approaches to diverse student needs. Rondero and Casupanan (2024) also found that teachers who consistently assess their instructional choices develop greater resilience and resourcefulness, which are essential in under-resourced and remote learning environments. Erden (2020) further stressed the role of reflection in fostering professional growth, especially in multigrade contexts where dynamic planning and creativity are required to meet the challenges of heterogeneous classrooms.

**Leading with Resilience, Creativity, and Purpose in Multigrade Teaching.** Emerging from the lived experiences of the participants is a compelling picture of multigrade teachers who lead not by title, but through resilience, creativity, and a deep sense of purpose. Despite being placed in resource-constrained, remote environments and often without formal preparation for multigrade instruction, they continuously rise to the occasion—adapting, innovating, and growing. Their narratives reflect how challenges became catalysts for transformation, shaping both their personal and professional identities.

As verbalized and written by the teachers:

*“Teaching multigrade classes has made me more resilient, flexible, and compassionate. I’ve had to develop creative ways to engage different grade levels simultaneously. Despite the challenges, I’ve learned to value small victories and celebrate the progress of my learners, no matter how small.” (P1)*

*“In my case, teaching in a multigrade classroom with no formal training forced me to be resourceful and think on my feet. I learned that teaching is not just about delivering content but also about being patient, creative, and committed, even without the support I need.” (P2)*

*“These experiences have shaped me into a more resilient and reflective teacher. I’ve learned to rely on my instincts and experiences to overcome challenges and am aware of the importance of continuous growth.” (P3)*

*“Teaching multigrade classes has taught me to be more creative, patient, and flexible. I’ve had to plan lessons carefully to meet the varying needs of my learners, and I’ve learned to be more compassionate and understanding.” (P4)*

*“Despite the challenges, teaching multigrade classes has made me more confident, resourceful, and open to collaboration. Watching my learners succeed despite the difficulties has strengthened my commitment to innovative teaching methods and continuous improvement.” (P5)*

*“Even if the situation is difficult, I find ways to teach. I use what is available around us. Sometimes, we do hands-on activities using recycled materials. I see that the learners enjoy and learn more when we are creative.” (P7)*

*“Teaching in remote areas showed me the importance of community engagement and creative problem-solving. These experiences have strengthened my commitment to providing quality education, regardless of location.” (P9)*

The teachers consistently conveyed how their day-to-day experiences in multigrade classrooms fostered personal and professional growth. They emphasized how being resilient allowed them to bounce back from setbacks and remain motivated, even in isolated and resource-scarce contexts. Creativity emerged not just in delivering lessons but in finding ways to manage time, motivate learners, and build engaging environments. Their statements also reflected a growing sense of purpose—teaching not merely as a job, but as a meaningful mission to make a difference in the lives of learners. These responses imply that multigrade teachers' professional resilience is forged through experience. Their creativity stems from necessity, and their sense of purpose is reinforced through meaningful engagement with their learners and communities. Despite systemic limitations, they find strength and inspiration in the small wins they witness in the classroom. These internal resources—resilience, creativity, and purpose—become essential tools for teaching effectively in multigrade settings. The findings are corroborated by Joubert (2010), who emphasized that successful multigrade teaching requires resilience and creativity, particularly when managing diverse learners without adequate support. Berry (2001) similarly noted that teachers working in such environments often cultivate dedication and a commitment to lifelong learning through their exposure to multifaceted classroom challenges. Ramrathan and Ngubane (2013) found that multigrade teachers, especially those in under-resourced settings, frequently evolve into innovative and independent problem-solvers who embrace their roles with a strong sense of agency.

### 3.2 Teaching Practices Reflected on the Narratives

The teaching practices of multigrade teachers are shaped by the unique challenges they face in managing classrooms with learners of varying ages and academic levels. These teachers demonstrate remarkable

adaptability, creativity, and resourcefulness in their instructional approaches. Their narratives highlight strategies that are both reactive to the immediate needs of their learners and proactive in fostering long-term academic and personal growth. These themes reflect the ways in which teachers adjust their methods to accommodate diverse learning needs, while also fostering a collaborative and engaging classroom environment. The following sections delve deeper into each theme, exploring the specific practices shared by the teachers and their implications for both teaching and student learning.

**Tailoring Lessons Through Differentiated Instruction.** Teachers in multigrade classrooms describe the practice of tailoring lessons to meet the diverse needs of their learners as a core aspect of their teaching approach. According to the teachers, differentiated instruction is essential for addressing the variety of learning abilities, styles, and paces within the same classroom. Rather than employing a one-size-fits-all method, teachers adjust their strategies to make sure that each student, regardless of age or skill level, is engaged and supported. This individualized approach, which often involves flexible grouping, tiered tasks, and peer tutoring, enables learners to engage with the material in a way that matches their learning needs, thereby fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

As verbalized and written by the teachers:

*“I rely heavily on differentiated instruction and peer tutoring. I group learners according to their abilities and grade levels and assign tasks that are appropriate for each group.” (P1)*

*“I use flexible grouping and tiered tasks to ensure that all learners, regardless of their grade level, can engage with the lesson at their own pace.” (P2)*

*“I group my pupils based on their abilities and assign activities that align with their learning pace.” (P3)*

*“Lagi akong gumagamit ng differentiated instruction at peer teaching. Binibigyan ko ng tasks ang mga mas advanced na estudyante para tulungan ang mas bata.” (P6) (“I always use differentiated instruction and peer teaching. I give tasks to more advanced learners to help the younger ones.”)*

*“I now integrate scaffolded activities and multi-level assessment tasks to cater to different learning abilities.” (P7)*

*“Now, I use a combination of differentiated instruction and learning stations. I design activities where learners work independently or in small groups, allowing me to rotate and provide focused instruction.” (P8)*

The participants emphasized that they rely on several strategies to differentiate instruction effectively. These include grouping learners according to ability, using tiered tasks, and incorporating peer tutoring, where more advanced learners assist those who are at lower levels. They also use scaffolding techniques and multi-level assessments to further support learners at various stages of learning. This implies that differentiated practices are significant for both teachers and learners. For teachers, this approach encourages flexibility and adaptability, fostering a deeper understanding of the varying needs of learners. It requires continuous assessment and adjustment to teaching methods. For learners, it provides an inclusive learning environment where they can progress at their own pace, ensuring that no one is left behind while challenging more advanced learners. This method also builds learners' confidence, as they can experience success at their own level, which can enhance motivation and engagement.

The use of differentiated instruction in multigrade classrooms has been widely supported in the literature. Okamoto (2020) emphasizes that differentiated activities, tailored to learners' learning styles, are particularly effective in multigrade settings. This is echoed by Recla and Potane (2023), who note that flexible, tiered tasks

help address the academic diversity of learners, ensuring that each learner engages meaningfully with the content. Lapuz (2015) and Mulryan-Kyne (2007) further stress the importance of tiered and flexible instruction in managing the academic diversity in multigrade classrooms. These studies affirm the importance of tailoring instruction to meet the needs of all learners and highlight how differentiated instruction can improve educational outcomes.

**Igniting Peer Tutoring and Collaboration.** From the sharing of the participants, it is evident that peer tutoring and collaborative learning are integral instructional approaches in multigrade classrooms. Teachers consistently rely on older or more advanced learners to assist younger learners during class activities. This method not only provides additional support to struggling learners but also deepens the understanding of those who teach their peers. Participants emphasized that assigning leadership roles and collaborative tasks fosters a classroom atmosphere where learning is both shared and socially meaningful.

As verbalized and written by the teachers:

*“I often use a combination of peer tutoring and independent learning. I assign older learners to assist the younger ones while I provide direct instruction to a small group. This not only helps the younger learners but also reinforces learning for the older ones.” (P2)*

*“Peer-assisted learning has become a big part of my strategy. I assign older learners to mentor the younger ones, which creates a collaborative learning environment and helps them reinforce their learning. It also builds leadership and responsibility among the older learners.” (P4)*

*“During my first multigrade assignment, I relied heavily on peer tutoring and collaborative learning. Older learners would assist the younger ones in reinforcing concepts, especially in subjects like Math and Reading.” (P8)*

*“Sa aking klase, laging may peer tutoring, ang mga mas matatandang estudyante ang nagtuturo sa mga mas bata at binibigyan ko sila ng mga tasks para magtulungan sila.” (“In my class, there’s always peer tutoring. Older learners teach the younger ones and I give them tasks to help each other.”) (P6)*

*“Kapag may mas advanced na estudyante, binibigyan ko sila ng pagkakataon na magturo sa mas bata. Sa ganitong paraan, natututo silang maging lider at responsable.” (“When there’s an advanced student, I give them the opportunity to teach the younger ones. This way, they learn to become leaders and responsible.”) (P7)*

The teachers consistently highlight that peer tutoring is a strategy that not only supports younger learners but also provides older learners with opportunities to reinforce their own learning. By assigning leadership roles to older learners, teachers build a sense of responsibility and leadership. Younger learners benefit from this approach by receiving individualized attention, which helps them grasp concepts at their own pace. This collaborative method ensures that no student is left behind, while also giving older learners a chance to review and deepen their understanding of the material. The use of peer tutoring and collaboration offers numerous benefits. For learners, this method helps develop a deeper understanding of the material, as they engage in teaching each other and reinforcing concepts. Peer tutoring enhances cognitive development by requiring tutors to articulate their understanding of the content, which also allows the tutees to grasp concepts more easily. Furthermore, the collaborative atmosphere fosters communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. For teachers, peer tutoring lightens the workload by allowing learners to support each other, freeing the teacher to focus on smaller groups or provide more targeted support.

Research supports the effectiveness of peer tutoring and collaboration in multigrade settings. Jordaan (2006) emphasizes that peer-assisted learning enhances knowledge retention and fosters collaboration among learners, promoting a more dynamic classroom environment. Similarly, Naparan and Alinsug (2019) found that peer

tutoring and collaborative activities create more opportunities for learners to engage with the material, which improves their learning experience. These studies suggest that peer tutoring not only benefits the tutees but also enhances the tutors' understanding of the content by requiring them to explain concepts in a simpler, more digestible manner.

**Generating Engaged Learning through Thematic Integration and Task Rotation.** Based on participant narratives, the theme refers to the use of a unifying topic that connects learning across multiple grade levels, with tasks tailored to different developmental and academic levels. This method enables teachers to deliver one cohesive lesson while ensuring differentiated learning through modified tasks. Task rotation, on the other hand, provides structure and variety by allowing learners to move between activities at their own pace, which supports independent learning and sustained engagement.

Teachers' reflections on their use of these strategies provide insight into their effectiveness in fostering engaged learning:

*"I use thematic teaching where I introduce a single theme that I can modify based on each grade level's learning competencies. For example, when teaching about animals, I let the younger ones identify basic animal names while the older ones learn about animal classifications." (P2)*

*"I also use thematic integration where I introduce a topic that I can adapt for both Grades 5 and 6, allowing me to engage all learners at once." (P3)*

*"I also use group work and thematic teaching, where one topic is explored at varying levels of difficulty to match the abilities of both grade levels." (P5)*

*"Nagde-design ako ng mga multi-level activities para kahit magkakaibang grade, may interconnected learning. Minsan, gumagamit ako ng thematic approach para ma-integrate ang lessons across different grade levels." (P6) ("I design multi-level activities so that even though the grades are different, there is interconnected learning. Sometimes, I use a thematic approach to integrate lessons across different grade levels.")*

*"I also used thematic teaching, where I would design lessons around a single theme and differentiate tasks for each grade level." (P8)*

*"I use task boards where learners rotate through different activities, allowing them to work independently while I provide direct instruction to a specific group." (P9)*

Teachers consistently emphasized using thematic teaching to unify their multigrade lessons under one central idea, allowing them to differentiate content based on learners' grade levels. This technique ensures inclusivity, enabling all learners to relate to a single topic but at varying depths of understanding. At the same time, task rotation empowers learners to learn independently through structured stations or tasks that rotate, which keeps them engaged while the teacher provides targeted instruction to specific groups. These strategies make multigrade instruction more manageable and effective. Thematic integration fosters continuity in learning and provides a shared context for instruction across grade levels, while allowing cognitive differentiation. Task rotation supports independent learning, helps sustain attention, and ensures that classroom routines are smooth, enabling teachers to address individual learning needs. Together, these practices contribute to higher student engagement, foster self-directed learning habits, and create an organized, dynamic classroom environment despite grade-level diversity.

Little (2001) highlighted that thematic integration is an effective approach for multigrade settings as it creates interconnected learning experiences where learners engage with content at varying levels of complexity. The use of central themes facilitates deeper exploration and understanding while ensuring content is accessible to all learners. Lapuz (2015) reinforced this by noting that thematic integration and task rotation provide structure

and flexibility, which are necessary for managing diverse learners in multigrade classrooms. These techniques allow for more individualized attention and keep learners productively engaged, even when the teacher focuses on one group at a time. In addition, Brown (2009) found that when learners engage with rotating tasks and thematic content, they are more likely to develop critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and sustained interest in the learning process. Task rotation also encourages independent learning and time management—key competencies in multigrade environments where teacher attention is divided.

**Refining Time Management and Flexible Scheduling in Multigrade Classrooms.** Based from the narratives, refining time management and implementing flexible scheduling are crucial strategies that allow multigrade teachers to balance their instructional responsibilities across different grade levels. Teachers highlighted how structured routines, subject integration, and intentional time blocks help them efficiently deliver both group and individual instruction. This theme captures how multigrade teachers optimize limited instructional time through planning and adaptability, enabling them to meet diverse student needs without compromising learning outcomes. As verbalized and written by the teachers:

*“I try to maximize my time by integrating subjects whenever possible. For example, I combine language and science through storytelling or writing activities.” (P1)*

*“Time management is a daily struggle. I try to maximize my time by using a routine and rotation system where I give give direct instruction to one group while the others work on tasks independently. I’ve also learned to integrate subjects whenever possible to save time and ensure that all learners are engaged.” (P2)*

*“I follow a structured routine that begins with shared activities to foster a sense of community and engagement. I allocate specific time slots for direct instruction, group work, and individual tasks. While one group works independently, I rotate my attention to provide focused instruction to the other, ensuring that each group receives the support they need.” (P3)*

*“I set routines and give independent tasks so I can focus on small groups one at a time.” (P4)*

*“I follow a structured routine that begins with shared activities to foster a sense of community and engagement. I allocate specific time slots for direct instruction, group work, and individual tasks.” (P5)*

*“Time management is key! Nageset ako ng clear routines at schedules para alam ng mga bata kung kailan nila gagawin ang seatwork, group work at discussion. May rotation din ako ng activities para habang tinututukan ko ang isang grupo, may independent task naman ang iba. Prioritization din ang gunagawa ko, lalo na kapag may specific skills na kailangang i-focus.” (“Time management is key! I set clear routines and schedules so the learners know when to do seatwork, group work, and discussions. I also rotate activities so that while I’m focusing on one group, the others have independent tasks. I also prioritize, especially when there are specific skills that need to be focused on.”) (P6)*

The participants’ responses reveal their strategic use of both structure and flexibility to manage the demands of multigrade classrooms. Teachers commonly begin with community-building activities, followed by the allocation of specific time blocks for different instructional formats: direct teaching, collaborative learning, and independent tasks. This rotation allows them to attend to individual groups without neglecting others. Additionally, by integrating subjects like language and science into one activity, they can reduce redundancy and optimize limited instructional time. These practices highlight the significance of intentional time planning in multigrade settings. Structured routines reduce confusion and help establish a predictable learning environment, essential for classroom management. At the same time, the flexibility to adapt based on learners’ needs or content demands makes instruction more effective. Subject integration not only conserves time but also enriches

the learning experience by promoting cross-disciplinary connections. These methods contribute to a smoother flow of lessons and a more balanced instructional delivery that meets the cognitive and emotional needs of diverse learners.

Castigador (2019) emphasized the role of clear routines in maintaining classroom order in multigrade settings. When learners know what to expect, they are more likely to remain focused and engaged, which makes transitions between activities smoother and minimizes time loss. Blease and Condy (2015) recommended the use of interdisciplinary teaching as a time-saving strategy in multigrade classrooms. Integrating related subjects into a single lesson promotes holistic learning while reducing the need for multiple, separate instructional periods. Mulryan-Kyne (2007) also noted that efficient use of time is a core skill for multigrade teachers. She observed that teachers who structure their day carefully are better able to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of mixed-age groups without sacrificing the quality of learning. Similarly, Rondero and Casupanan (2024) found that effective time management techniques, such as rotating instruction between student groups and utilizing peer-led activities, can significantly reduce teacher burnout and improve student engagement. Jordaan (2006) argued that flexible scheduling empowers multigrade teachers to respond dynamically to the classroom's flow, adjusting instruction based on observed student needs and energy levels, thereby fostering a more responsive and supportive learning environment.

### *3.3 Influences of Teacher Narratives to Teaching Practices*

The narratives shared by multigrade teachers provide valuable insights into the strategies they employ to overcome the challenges of teaching in diverse classroom settings. These firsthand experiences reveal how teachers adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of learners at different grade levels, as well as the unique demands of multigrade teaching. The reflections and strategies discussed by the teachers not only highlight the complexity of multigrade classrooms but also demonstrate their resourcefulness and commitment to providing quality education.

**Adapting Tailored Lessons for Multi-Level Learners.** Adapting tailored lessons for multi-level learners in a multigrade setting refers to the deliberate planning and differentiation of instructional content to meet the cognitive, developmental, and academic needs of learners belonging to various grade levels. Multigrade teachers design lesson plans that offer varied pathways for learning, often using thematic teaching, tiered activities, and differentiated questioning techniques to ensure that each learner remains engaged and supported. As expressed by the teachers:

*“My experiences have taught me to be more intentional in my lesson planning. I’ve learned to plan lessons that cater to multiple grade levels by using thematic teaching. For instance, if I’m teaching about plants, I introduce the topic to all grade levels but assign different tasks that match their developmental levels.” (P1)*

*“Because I handle multiple grade levels, I’ve learned to plan my lessons by integrating subjects and themes. I have to think of creative ways to make the lessons meaningful for all my students, even if they’re at different grade levels. My lesson plans are always flexible because I know that unexpected things can happen, and I have to be ready to adjust.” (P2)*

*“I create lesson plans that include tiered activities catering to different skill levels. I also plan for multiple outcomes to anticipate how different groups might respond to a lesson.” (P3)*

*“I’ve learned to plan flexibly by creating activities that can be adjusted for different skill levels. I also make sure to include time for collaborative work and independent practice.” (P4)*

*“When I plan my lessons, I have to think about how to keep both grade levels engaged. I often modify my lesson plans by incorporating tiered questioning and task variation.” (P8)*

Teachers shared how lesson planning in a multigrade classroom involves far more than preparing a single set of activities. Their strategies include intentionally aligning content with the learning objectives of different grade levels while tailoring tasks to suit learners' readiness, interests, and abilities. Thematic instruction serves as a unifying approach, but the actual learning tasks are customized—for example, by adjusting questions or assigning varied outputs depending on developmental levels. These approaches underscore the need for thoughtful, adaptive instruction in multigrade settings. Lesson planning becomes a multidimensional process that demands a deep understanding of curriculum standards across multiple levels, along with the capacity to differentiate without losing instructional cohesion. This also emphasizes the necessity of equipping multigrade teachers with tools, time, and training for developing these kinds of flexible instructional designs. Without proper support, the cognitive load of multigrade lesson planning can lead to teacher burnout or instructional gaps.

This corroborated with Naparan and Alinsug (2021) who pointed out the significant effort involved in lesson planning in multigrade classrooms, advocating for continuous professional development to enhance teachers' ability to differentiate effectively. Their study highlights how tailored instruction directly influences classroom inclusivity and learner engagement. Mulryan-Kyne (2007) similarly asserted that differentiated planning is a hallmark of effective multigrade instruction. She noted that the most successful multigrade teachers use intentional scaffolding and tiered activities to accommodate a wide range of learners, ensuring academic progress across all levels. Furthermore, Okamoto (2020) emphasized that tailoring lessons in multigrade settings contributes to more equitable educational outcomes. When instructional strategies are differentiated, learners are more likely to succeed regardless of their starting point or grade level. Supporting this, Taole and Mncube (2012) highlighted that teachers in rural and multigrade contexts must innovate constantly to tailor content, not only due to academic diversity but also because of limited resources and time constraints. Finally, Recla and Potane (2024) also stressed that creating level-appropriate lessons across grades is one of the most time-consuming but necessary aspects of multigrade teaching, noting that the ability to differentiate is key to maintaining student engagement and pacing.

**Defining Strategies to Tame Classroom Noise.** This involves the intentional development of classroom management techniques that help multigrade teachers maintain order, promote engagement, and address the behavioral and academic needs of learners from varying grade levels simultaneously. This includes creating independent tasks, organizing space and time efficiently, and using structured routines that minimize disruption and maximize learning time. Teachers must juggle their attention between groups while maintaining a calm, productive, and inclusive environment.

The following teacher verbatims and written responses exemplify these struggles:

*“A significant challenge I faced was maintaining the attention of my Grade 5 learners while giving focused instruction to Grade 6. Initially, I struggled with classroom management because learners would often get distracted when I was attending to the other group.” (P3)*

*“One of the most difficult aspects of managing a multigrade class is ensuring that the younger learners don't feel neglected while I attend to the older ones. I sometimes have to resort to giving seatwork or independent activities to maintain order.” (P5)*

*“It's really hard to balance my attention between different grade levels. When I'm focusing on one group, the other often gets restless, and it's a struggle to maintain discipline.” (P9)*

The teachers' responses reveal the overwhelming nature of maintaining order and attention within a diverse multigrade classroom. Shifting focus from one grade level to another without losing student engagement or discipline is a daily challenge. Teachers often resort to time-filling independent activities or structured seatwork to keep one group busy while instructing another. Despite these efforts, maintaining classroom harmony continues to be one of the most difficult aspects of their role. These challenges highlight the urgent need for

strategic classroom management training specific to multigrade contexts. Teachers must be equipped with techniques to manage attention across levels, organize student groupings effectively, and implement proactive behavior strategies. Without adequate support in this area, student learning can be compromised, teacher stress levels may increase, and classroom environments may become less conducive to inclusive education.

This aligns with Sampson and Condy (2016) who emphasized that poor classroom structure in multigrade settings results in behavioral issues and reduced student focus. This aligns with the teachers' experiences of restlessness and distraction when attention is split. Similarly, Blease and Condy (2015) noted that the absence of strong classroom management strategies often leads to a chaotic learning environment, undermining educational outcomes. Kalender and Erdem (2021) further documented the emotional toll on teachers, pointing out that the constant demand to manage multiple groups with differing needs results in fatigue and reduced motivation. Bongala et al. (2020) also emphasized the need for developing inclusive classroom practices that allow for individual attention while ensuring classroom order. Naparan et al. (2021) supported these claims by highlighting how efficient space and time management, paired with carefully designed group and independent work, can mitigate noise in multigrade classrooms.

**Empowering Teachers with Creativity and Resourcefulness.** This involves cultivating and recognizing their ability to innovate and adapt within constraints—particularly in multigrade settings where access to teaching materials and support is often limited. Multigrade teachers frequently tap into their creativity to design instructional aids, repurpose local and household materials, and tailor lessons to their learners' needs despite scarce resources. This adaptability not only enhances learning but also demonstrates a deep commitment to providing quality education under challenging conditions.

The verbalizations and written responses of teachers illustrate their creative approaches:

*"I have become creative over the years. I now know how to use recycled materials and even household items to make instructional aids that fit my lessons." (P5)*

*"I created handmade flashcards, visual aids, and even utilized natural resources from the community to supplement my teaching." (P8)*

*"I addressed the lack of materials by creating improvised teaching aids using locally available materials. I also developed self-learning modules for learners to work on independently." (P9)*

These statements reveal how teachers meet the challenge of material scarcity through creative and practical solutions. Instead of relying solely on standard resources, they harness everyday objects, recycled materials, and natural elements to construct meaningful learning tools. Their willingness to go beyond traditional methods—by creating self-learning modules or crafting aids tailored to lesson needs—reflects a profound sense of dedication and innovation. The creativity demonstrated by teachers underscores the value of supporting professional growth that nurtures ingenuity. Schools and educational stakeholders should provide platforms for sharing creative practices and recognize resourcefulness as a core teaching competency in multigrade settings. Encouraging collaboration and innovation can help other teachers discover new strategies to overcome similar limitations. More importantly, system-level support (such as training programs focused on low-cost materials and peer mentoring) can amplify the impact of teacher-led solutions.

Castigador (2019) and Msimanga (2019) both acknowledged that in the face of limited educational resources, multigrade teachers often dig deep into their creativity to sustain quality instruction. Their studies revealed that some teachers even personally funded the creation of learning materials, reflecting a high level of dedication. Blease and Condy (2015) highlighted that adaptability and resourcefulness are indispensable qualities in multigrade teaching, especially in remote or under-resourced areas. Mulryan-Kyne (2007) further observed that such innovation is frequently born out of necessity, leading to the development of unique instructional techniques. Jordaan (2006) echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the multigrade setup, despite its demands,

serves as fertile ground for fostering resilience and creative problem-solving in teachers.

### 3.4 Training Needs Reflected

The effectiveness of multigrade teaching largely depends on addressing the specific challenges faced by teachers in such settings. Based on the insights gathered from the teachers, several key training needs have emerged. These needs point to areas where targeted professional development and support systems could significantly enhance instructional quality.

**Meeting the Challenge: Bridging the Gap with Training and Support.** The theme captures the pressing need for professional development programs specifically tailored for multigrade teachers. While teachers demonstrate resilience and adaptability, their narratives underscore a shared concern: the lack of formal training in differentiated instruction, classroom management, and technology integration—skills essential for navigating the complexity of multigrade classrooms. Without systematic support, teachers are left to rely on trial and error, which affects their confidence and instructional effectiveness.

As verbalized and written by the teachers:

*“I feel that I lack formal training in differentiated instruction and classroom management specific to multigrade settings. Most of what I do now is based on trial and error.” (P1)*

*“I struggle with assessing my learners effectively because I’m not sure if I’m using the right strategies for multigrade settings.” (P2)*

*“Since I haven’t had formal training in the last five years, I feel that I lack updated strategies on differentiated assessment and technology integration.” (P3)*

*“I often rely on trial and error.” (P4)*

*“I still need more knowledge on differentiated instruction and advanced classroom management strategies.” (P5)*

*“Formal training would strengthen my confidence in handling diverse learners.” (P8)*

*“I feel that I need more training in integrating digital literacy tools and managing multiple grade levels.” (P9)*

The teachers’ voices strongly point to a deficit in targeted professional development. Despite their efforts and years of experience, they lack specialized guidance in handling multigrade classes. Their statements reflect a desire for structured training—especially in areas like differentiated instruction, classroom management, and use of digital tools—that would help them move beyond improvised strategies and boost both confidence and instructional effectiveness.

When reconciled with the earlier findings, specific training needs become even more evident. Teachers were shown to engage in differentiated instruction and thematic integration, but their efforts were limited by a lack of foundational knowledge and structured strategies, pointing to the need for professional learning on multi-level lesson planning and differentiated assessment. It also revealed persistent struggles in classroom management, with teachers noting difficulty in keeping all learners engaged and maintaining discipline, thus emphasizing the need for training on advanced classroom management techniques tailored to multigrade environments. Moreover, while teachers displayed remarkable creativity and resourcefulness, often using recycled or local materials to support instruction, their innovation also pointed to the absence of systemic support. Training programs must not only enhance this creativity but also equip teachers with the tools to effectively design structured, scalable lessons, including context-appropriate digital resources.

These findings are reinforced by existing literature. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) emphasized the widespread lack of access to updated training and modern methodologies, a reality echoed in this study. Bongala et al. (2020) highlighted that teachers in multigrade settings are often unprepared to teach and assess across multiple levels due to the absence of context-specific professional development. Miranda (2012) also pointed to gaps in pre- and in-service training, particularly in classroom management and multigrade teaching methodologies—gaps that the current participants explicitly confirmed.

**Activating Technology to Bring Lessons to Life.** The theme highlights the growing recognition among multigrade teachers of the value of technology in enhancing student learning—especially in geographically isolated areas like Cervantes, where difficult terrain and limited resources pose daily challenges. Despite their willingness to adopt digital tools, teachers emphasized their need for formal training on how to effectively integrate technology in the multigrade context.

This need is clearly articulated in their statements:

*“I would benefit greatly from training on how to incorporate low-cost technology tools to enhance student engagement” (P1);*

*“Even with my experience, I feel that I need more training in integrating digital literacy tools in multigrade settings.” (P2)*

*“I try to incorporate digital tools like videos and interactive apps whenever possible, but I feel I could be more effective with formal training” (P3);*

*“I try to incorporate digital tools like videos and interactive apps whenever possible, but I feel I could be more effective with formal training.” (P4)*

*“Training in the use of low-cost digital tools can improve instructional quality and engagement.” (P8)*

*“Even with my experience, I feel that I need more training in integrating digital literacy tools in multigrade settings” (P9)*

These reflections underscore a pressing demand for professional development that addresses not only the technical know-how but also the pedagogical application of technology in diverse-grade classrooms.

This theme further amplifies the findings that emerged from the earlier narratives. Teachers’ limited yet earnest attempts at thematic and differentiated instruction—as seen in the first finding—were often hampered by minimal or inconsistent use of technology, largely due to a lack of training and confidence. Although they recognized the value of integrating digital tools, their implementation remained surface-level, revealing a clear gap in capacity-building.

In the second finding, teachers voiced struggles with managing classroom behavior while juggling instruction across multiple grade levels. This highlights the potential of technology as a supportive tool—not as a replacement for instruction, but as a means of engaging different learner groups simultaneously through self-paced tasks, digital storytelling, or multimedia resources tailored to each level.

The third finding showcased the teachers’ creativity and ingenuity in crafting instructional materials from recycled and local resources. This inventive spirit suggests a strong readiness to embrace technology more fully—if only they were given structured training and access. With proper support, these teachers could harness digital tools not just to enhance engagement but also to streamline lesson delivery, facilitate remediation, and conduct differentiated assessment aligned with learners’ developmental stages.

This finding resonates with Taole and Mncube (2012), who emphasized the value of technology integration

in improving instructional delivery, particularly in under-resourced and remote contexts. Similarly, Rondero and Casupanan (2024) stressed the transformative impact of digital tools in enriching multigrade instruction and expanding access to engaging content. The lack of formal training, however, remains a critical barrier. Professional development programs must therefore prioritize equipping teachers with practical skills in using low-cost, accessible technologies that are appropriate for multigrade classrooms.

**Grounding Teaching Practices in Contextualized Approaches.** The theme underscores the teachers' call for relevant, localized, and practical professional development that aligns with the unique challenges of multigrade classrooms. Participants consistently emphasized the need for training programs that address differentiated instruction, time and classroom management, assessment strategies, and the integration of technology in resource-limited settings.

Their voices and written responses clearly reflect this need:

*“There should be more context-specific training programs that address the realities of multigrade teaching. Professional development should include strategies for differentiated instruction, time management, and creating engaging activities that work across multiple grade levels. I also suggest that teachers be provided with sample lesson plans and ready-to-use instructional materials designed for multigrade settings” (P1).*

*“To improve multigrade teaching practices, training programs should focus on practical applications of differentiated instruction, classroom management techniques, and assessment strategies tailored for multigrade settings. Teachers should also be trained on integrating technology effectively in a resource-constrained environment” (P3)*

*“Improving multigrade teaching practices requires regular and updated training programs that address both instructional strategies and classroom management.” (P5)*

These reflections build upon earlier insights shared by teachers regarding their efforts to tailor instruction for diverse learners, manage multiple grade levels simultaneously, and remain creative despite a lack of formal training and resources. Their experiences revealed a consistent pattern: while they have demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness, there remains a critical gap in targeted support that equips them with applicable tools and strategies. Teachers are not just asking for more training—they are advocating for development opportunities that resonate with their actual classroom contexts and enable them to respond more effectively to the complex dynamics of multigrade education.

This call for contextualized professional development is supported by scholars such as Mulryan-Kyne (2007), who noted that conventional training models are often misaligned with the needs of multigrade classrooms. Joubert (2010) similarly stressed the importance of building specific competencies like curriculum adaptation, flexible scheduling, and learner-centered approaches. Ramrathan and Ngubane (2013) further emphasized that effective training must include strategies for differentiated instruction, the use of low-cost educational technologies, and contextualized assessment to be truly impactful in rural and multigrade settings.

**Innovating Instructional Delivery for Effective Learning.** The theme captures the need for accessible, adaptable, and ready-to-use teaching resources, especially in multigrade classrooms. Teachers emphasized that such materials could significantly reduce preparation time, improve instructional efficiency, and support differentiated teaching across multiple grade levels. Additionally, they noted the value of integrating both digital and offline tools, especially in resource-constrained environments. Teachers' responses highlight this need:

*“Training programs should include ready-to-use templates for lesson planning, adaptable activity sheets, and classroom management guides. It would also be great to have digital tools like interactive apps, instructional videos, or online platforms that enhance student engagement. We also need training on low-cost, creative ways to develop materials, and a repository of*

*instructional resources specifically for multigrade contexts.” (P1)*

*“I would benefit from having access to ready-made materials that I can adapt for different grade levels. It would help me be more efficient with my time and ensure that I meet the needs of my learners across various grades.” (P2)*

*“Having materials that can be used for different grades without starting from scratch would save me a lot of time. It would help me focus on teaching rather than always looking for or making resources.” (P8)*

The need for practical, ready-made resources is central to the experiences of multigrade teachers. Teachers reported that constantly creating new materials for every lesson, especially when managing multiple grade levels, is an overwhelming task. Ready-to-use templates and adaptable teaching resources would ease this burden, allowing teachers to concentrate on delivering lessons rather than spending excessive time on preparation. Furthermore, the availability of digital tools, particularly those that can be used in resource-limited environments, would provide a more flexible teaching framework. These resources would enable teachers to cater to the diverse needs of learners, even in classrooms with limited access to traditional materials.

This finding suggests that educational leaders and curriculum developers should prioritize creating and distributing multigrade-specific teaching kits and digital resource libraries. Teachers would benefit from being trained on how to effectively utilize these resources, including offline formats for areas with limited internet access. Additionally, the creation of a centralized digital repository where teachers can access and contribute resources could foster a collaborative environment where resources are continually updated and refined to meet evolving classroom needs. Such innovations in instructional delivery would empower teachers to focus more on engaging learners and less on resource preparation, leading to more effective teaching and improved student outcomes.

**Cultivating Collaboration for Effective Teaching Practices.** The theme reflects the collective desire among teachers for sustained mentorship, peer collaboration, and continuous professional support. Multigrade teachers emphasized that working in isolation limits their development and that structured support systems could improve their instructional practices. This includes the need for mentorship from experienced colleagues, opportunities for peer-sharing, and consistent follow-up to ensure the practical application of newly acquired skills and knowledge.

Several teachers highlighted the importance of having structured systems for collaboration and professional growth:

*“An ideal support system would include regular mentorship from experienced multigrade teachers, continuous professional development, and peer-sharing sessions where we can exchange ideas and strategies. There should also be an accessible online platform where we can download lesson plans, share best practices, and ask for advice. I would also love to see follow-up support after training sessions to ensure we’re able to apply what we’ve learned in real classroom settings.” (P1)*

*“Mentoring and peer observation opportunities are important to foster collaborative learning. There should also be training in digital literacy and the provision of resources to help manage diverse learning needs.” (P8)*

The teachers' statements reveal that they do not only seek individual knowledge and skills but also long for a supportive, collaborative environment. They believe that working alongside colleagues—both seasoned and new—could facilitate better learning experiences and overcome the isolation that often comes with teaching in remote, resource-limited environments. Their responses underscore the importance of both formal and informal structures, such as mentorship, peer observation, and shared platforms, where they can learn from one another

and refine their teaching practices.

The desire for ongoing mentorship and collaboration has significant implications for professional development. Educational leaders and policymakers must shift away from one-off training sessions and instead create formal, continuous support systems. Formal mentorship programs could pair novice teachers with experienced ones, fostering deeper learning and quicker adaptation to multigrade environments. Additionally, developing professional learning communities (PLCs) within or across districts would provide teachers with continuous opportunities to exchange teaching strategies and experiences. Furthermore, creating an online hub where teachers can share resources, download lesson plans, and engage in discussions will provide a platform for sustained, asynchronous collaboration.

The need for collaboration and mentorship aligns with the findings of Mulkeen and Higgins (2009), who pointed out that mentoring is crucial for helping teachers handle the complexities of multigrade teaching. Similarly, Sampson and Condy (2016) emphasized that peer-learning communities are vital for enhancing teaching quality and boosting teacher confidence. Recla and Potane (2023) also confirmed that structured mentorship and peer collaboration positively influence teaching effectiveness and professional growth, particularly in multigrade settings. These studies confirm the teachers' call for a collaborative, supported teaching environment.

### 3.5 Valid Training Design

The development of the training design titled "Unlocking Multigrade Magic: Innovative Strategies for Effective Teaching" was anchored on the identified challenges and professional development needs of multigrade teachers in the Cervantes District, Ilocos Sur. Multigrade teaching remains a practical solution in geographically isolated and resource-limited areas, but teachers often face difficulties such as lack of training in differentiated instruction, insufficient classroom management strategies, limited access to instructional and digital resources, and the emotional demands of juggling various teaching and administrative roles.

These challenges informed the design of a training program that aims to enhance multigrade teachers' pedagogical competence, time and classroom management skills, lesson planning abilities, digital literacy, and collaborative practices. The program also promotes mentorship and peer-learning strategies to ensure continuous improvement and professional support within the multigrade teaching community.

The training matrix, reflected in the detailed training curriculum, outlines the specific topics and sessions to be delivered by identified resource persons. It includes the corresponding instructional strategies (e.g., interactive lectures, workshops, peer mentoring), time allotments, and evaluation mechanisms (e.g., peer feedback, output presentations, reflection activities).

The content of the training spans 16 structured sessions across five weeks, focusing on (1) Foundational understanding of multigrade teaching and its challenges; (2) Effective classroom and time management strategies; (3) Designing multilevel lesson plans and contextualized activity sheets; (4) Implementing differentiated instruction and peer-assisted learning techniques; (5) Utilizing low-cost digital tools and developing offline learning modules; (6) Promoting peer mentoring networks and monitoring student progress through contextualized assessment.

To evaluate the training's impact and ensure continuity of learning, a monitoring and evaluation component has been built into the design. This includes follow-up classroom observations, mentoring sessions, reflective feedback from participants, and quarterly knowledge-sharing activities.

Overall, the training design reflects a holistic and context-sensitive approach to improving instructional quality in multigrade classrooms. It responds directly to the needs of teachers and supports the long-term goal of ensuring equitable, inclusive, and high-quality education in remote and rural settings.

#### 4. Tables and figures

**Table 1**

*Validation of Ratings of the Developed Training Design from School Heads*

##### I. Objectives

Indicator	Mean	Descriptive Rating
a. The objectives are clear.	3.80	Very Highly Valid
b. The objectives are S.M.A.R.T.	3.40	Highly Valid
c. The objectives are comprehensive.	3.80	Very Highly Valid
d. The objectives respond to identified and pressing needs.	3.40	Highly Valid
e. The objectives are based on the abilities of the recipients.	3.20	Highly Valid

Overall Mean for Objectives: 3.52

Descriptive Rating: Very Highly Valid

##### II. Content

Indicator	Mean	Descriptive Rating
a. The contents are needs-based.	4.00	Very Highly Valid
b. The contents are arranged logically.	3.80	Very Highly Valid
c. The contents are appropriate and relevant.	4.00	Very Highly Valid
d. The contents can improve the delivery of quality instruction and training.	3.80	Very Highly Valid
e. The contents/activities are congruent to the objectives.	4.00	Very Highly Valid

Overall Mean for Content: 3.92

Descriptive Rating: Very Highly Valid

##### III. Usefulness

Indicator	Mean	Descriptive Rating
a. The output can be used at any particular time.	3.40	Highly Valid
b. The output is easy to use and implement.	3.80	Very Highly Valid
c. The output addresses the improvement of functions of concerned people.	4.00	Very Highly Valid
d. The output defines the key concerns and objectives.	3.40	Highly Valid
e. The output can be used by the concerned individuals/end-users.	4.00	Very Highly Valid

Overall Mean for Usefulness: 3.72

Descriptive Rating: Very Highly Valid

Grand Mean of the Training Design: 3.72

Descriptive Rating: Very Highly Valid

To ensure the quality and relevance of the proposed training design for multigrade teachers, a content validation process was conducted using a checklist evaluated by five expert validators. Each rater assessed the training design based on fifteen key criteria grouped under three major categories: Objectives, Content, and Usefulness. Based on the evaluation results using the Content Validity Checklist, the proposed training design yielded a grand mean score of 3.72, which falls under the Very Highly Valid (VHV) category. This suggests that the training design is well-structured, relevant, and appropriate for its intended purpose of supporting teachers in multigrade contexts.

According to the validation feedback, the Objectives of the training design received an overall mean of 3.52 (VHV), indicating that the goals were clearly articulated, relevant to the target participants, and aligned with their instructional needs. The Content component yielded the highest mean of 3.92 (VHV), showing that the training topics, activities, and flow were logically sequenced and highly relevant to the realities of multigrade teaching. The Usefulness criterion received a mean of 3.72 (VHV), affirming that the training is practical, adaptable, and beneficial in enhancing teaching effectiveness in diverse classroom settings.

Although all criteria were rated positively, some areas such as the comprehensiveness of the objectives, contextual adaptability, and ease of application of strategies received slightly lower—yet still valid—scores. This

suggests opportunities for improvement in providing more concrete examples, scaffolds, or technology-enhanced components that could further increase the training's effectiveness and inclusivity.

In conclusion, the validation results indicate that the proposed training design, UNLOCKING MULTIGRADE MAGIC: Innovative Strategies for Effective Teaching, is very highly valid in terms of its content, objectives, and practical application. With minor refinements in a few areas, the training has strong potential to support professional development among multigrade teachers, ultimately enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in geographically isolated and resource-limited schools.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted nature of multigrade teaching and the strategies employed by teachers to overcome the inherent challenges in such settings.

The study found that teachers in multigrade classrooms in Cervantes share narratives highlighting their resilience and creativity in addressing the challenges of teaching students across multiple grade levels. Their experiences emphasize the importance of adaptability and resourcefulness in ensuring student success. Teachers reported continuously refining their practices through reflection, allowing them to better meet the diverse needs of their students. This aligns with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the role of reflection and self-efficacy in overcoming teaching challenges. To improve practice, teachers should be encouraged to engage in reflective practices regularly, ensuring that they have the support to adapt their methods. Policymakers should prioritize professional development programs that integrate reflective practice, enabling teachers to grow and develop in response to the unique demands of multigrade classrooms. In terms of intervention, mentoring programs and professional learning communities can support teachers in their reflective processes, helping them build resilience in the face of multigrade teaching demands.

The narratives also revealed that teachers utilize a variety of strategies such as differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, thematic integration, and task rotation to manage the different academic levels in their classrooms. These strategies help maintain student engagement while addressing the diverse learning needs of their students. The findings suggest that teachers should continue using these methods, as they are effective in engaging all learners. Education policies should focus on providing professional development that equips teachers with the skills to implement differentiated instruction and peer tutoring, with a focus on flexible scheduling. The findings are consistent with Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Theory and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which emphasize scaffolding and collaborative learning. Intervention programs should focus on providing teachers with resources and opportunities for professional development to help them successfully implement these strategies.

Teachers also reflected on the difficulty of planning lessons for students at different levels and managing diverse classrooms. The narratives showed that teachers often rely on creativity and resourcefulness to address these challenges. To support teachers in overcoming these barriers, it is essential that they receive ongoing professional development focused on multi-level lesson planning and classroom management. Policymakers should recognize the complexity of multigrade classrooms and provide support through targeted training. Piaget's Constructivist Theory supports the need for flexible lesson planning and effective classroom management strategies. Intervention programs should focus on developing training modules that help teachers manage diverse classrooms and foster creativity in lesson delivery.

Inadequate training and limited support were significant barriers to effective teaching, particularly regarding technology integration and creating contextually relevant lessons. Teachers also noted difficulties in streamlining instructional delivery and fostering collaboration. To address these issues, education policies should prioritize comprehensive in-service training programs that focus on integrating technology and developing contextually appropriate teaching methods. These findings align with Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development and fostering collaborative environments. Intervention

strategies should focus on providing teachers with the tools and training necessary to integrate technology and develop relevant teaching methods, while also creating opportunities for collaborative teaching and resource sharing.

In response to these findings, the study led to the development of a training design focused on differentiated instruction, classroom and time management, and the effective use of low-cost digital tools. The design includes ready-to-use teaching materials, activity templates, and digital platforms that encourage collaborative learning and resource sharing among teachers. By offering practical teaching strategies and resources, this training design aims to improve instructional quality and reduce teacher burnout. It is essential that such training programs are flexible and accessible, particularly for teachers in remote areas. The training design aligns with Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, which advocates for self-directed and collaborative learning experiences. Intervention strategies should focus on ensuring that teachers have access to the resources, mentorship, and support necessary to implement these strategies effectively.

### 5.1 Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Educators and school leaders should engage in reflective practices where teachers are encouraged to share and discuss their personal experiences in teaching multigrade classrooms. By organizing regular story-sharing sessions or peer learning communities, teachers can identify common challenges, resourceful practices, and successful strategies that can be shared across schools. This approach will allow teachers to collectively make sense of their unique experiences in the multigrade context.
- Professional development programs should be designed around evidence-based instructional practices that reflect the diverse needs expressed by teachers in their narratives. These programs should focus on differentiated instruction, classroom management strategies, and the use of peer-assisted learning. Teachers must be equipped with the skills to implement flexible, engaging, and effective teaching practices that can address the varying needs of learners in a multigrade setting.
- Schools and training programs actively incorporate reflection and feedback loops into their professional development initiatives. Teachers should be encouraged to evaluate their teaching practices through action research or collaborative peer review. This will allow them to assess the impact of their narrative-driven strategies on student learning and provide opportunities for continuous improvement and adaptation of their practices based on reflective insights.
- Training programs should focus on providing contextualized professional development that addresses the specific challenges highlighted by teachers, such as multi-level lesson planning, effective classroom management, and integrating low-cost technologies. Additionally, training should prioritize the creation of practical teaching resources like multi-level lesson plans and adaptable materials, ensuring that teachers are not overwhelmed by preparation tasks. Continuous, ongoing training should be institutionalized to ensure teachers remain up-to-date with evolving pedagogical strategies.
- The “UNLOCKING MULTIGRADE MAGIC: INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING” training design, as identified in the study, should be adopted to cater to the multifaceted needs of multigrade teachers, focusing on key areas such as differentiated instruction, time management, and digital resource integration. The design should also integrate workshops and hands-on activities that allow teachers to immediately apply new concepts in their classrooms. Collaboration and mentorship components should be embedded in the training to ensure sustained professional growth and knowledge exchange.
- Future studies should explore the long-term effectiveness of the multigrade teacher training design on

both teacher performance and student outcomes. Research should also investigate the impact of peer mentoring and collaborative networks in fostering teacher development and improving instructional quality in multigrade classrooms. Additionally, studies could examine how resource-limited environments influence the adoption of digital tools and low-cost teaching resources, and how these barriers can be mitigated for effective learning.

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