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Examining the implementation and outcomes of multigrade classes in the school periphery in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study examined the implementation and outcomes of the Multigrade Program in the Magallanes Districts. It aimed to: (1) describe implementation program in terms of class organization, facilities, curriculum, and teacher support systems; (2) identify program implementation challenges; (3) assess learner progression outcomes based on promotion, dropout, and repetition rates; and (4) develop an evaluation guidebook grounded on the findings. A descriptive-qualitative design was employed using key participant interviews and documentary analysis. Results showed that teachers demonstrate adaptability in managing diverse learners; however, gaps persist in learning facilities, instructional resources, curriculum contextualization, and access to specialized training. Key challenges include insufficient materials, limited professional development, and workload-related constraints. Learner progression outcomes indicate concerns in retention and grade advancement. Based on these findings, an evaluation guidebook was developed to support systematic program assessment and improvement, focusing on resource provision, capacity building, curriculum responsiveness, and strengthened stakeholder support.

Keywords: challenges, evaluation guidebook, learner progression outcomes, multigrade implementation

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1. Introduction

Multigrade education is recognized as an essential strategy in providing inclusive and accessible education, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas where enrolment, teachers, and resources are limited. Globally and in the Philippines, the implementation of Multigrade classes is supported by educational policies and frameworks that emphasize differentiated instruction, curriculum integration, and equitable learning opportunities for diverse learners. However, despite strong legal and institutional support, the actual implementation of the program continues to face challenges related to instructional delivery, classroom organization, teacher preparation, and resource allocation. These implementation realities highlight the need to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of the Multigrade Program in improving learner performance and supporting teachers in remote school settings.

Global Perspective: Multigrade Education and Inclusive Learning

Multigrade education is widely recognized as a strategic and equity-driven response to the persistent challenge of providing access to quality education in contexts characterized by low enrolment, limited teaching personnel, and geographic isolation. It is commonly defined as an instructional arrangement where a single teacher simultaneously facilitates learning for two or more grade levels within the same classroom (Little, 2006). This model has been extensively implemented in developing regions across Asia, Africa, and Latin America as a cost-efficient and inclusive approach to expanding educational access (Bray, 1987). In the global discourse on education, Multigrade schooling is closely aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2015). Within this framework, Multigrade classrooms function as inclusive learning environments that accommodate diverse learner needs, abilities, and developmental levels. The success of such environments relies heavily on the application of differentiated instructional strategies, including flexible grouping, peer tutoring, and scaffolded learning activities, which enable teachers to address varying levels of learner readiness within a shared instructional space (Tomlinson, 2014; Taole, 2014).

Globally, the effectiveness of Multigrade education is strongly influenced by teacher qualification and professional preparation. Teachers in Multigrade settings are expected to possess specialized competencies in multi-level instruction, including the ability to design integrated lesson plans, manage simultaneous learning activities, and assess learners across different grade levels. This requires a shift from traditional Monograde teaching approaches toward more adaptive and learner-centered pedagogies. In addition, curriculum flexibility is a critical requirement in Multigrade education. Rigid, grade-specific curricula are often incompatible with Multigrade contexts; thus, effective systems adopt clustered or spiral approaches that allow integration of competencies across grade levels. This is closely linked to instructional planning and strategies, where teachers must carefully sequence lessons to ensure continuity and coherence across different learner groups.

The physical organizations of the classroom and time management are equally significant. Multigrade classrooms require structured yet flexible layouts that support simultaneous activities, such as group instruction, independent work, and peer collaboration. Teachers must also allocate limited instructional time across multiple grade levels, necessitating efficient scheduling and prioritization of learning tasks. Finally, global evidence underscores the importance of community and institutional support, as well as adequate policy backing and resource allocation. Access to instructional materials, administrative guidance, and localized support systems significantly influences the effectiveness of Multigrade implementation. However, studies also indicate variability in outcomes, often linked to gaps in teacher preparation, resource availability, and systemic support (Mulryan-

Kyne, 2007). These findings highlight that Multigrade education is not merely a structural solution but a complex pedagogical model requiring coherent alignment of multiple factors.

Legal Frameworks and Multigrade Education in the Philippines - In the Philippines, Multigrade education is firmly institutionalized through a series of legal mandates and policy frameworks that aim to ensure equitable access to basic education, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA). The formal recognition of Multigrade classes began with DepEd Order No. 38, s. 1993, which established Multigrade and combination classes as mechanisms for delivering complete elementary education in areas with low enrolment. This was further strengthened by Decs order 96 s 1997, which emphasized the expansion of educational services in underserved communities. These foundational policies reflect the government's commitment to inclusivity and access. However, subsequent policy developments recognize that access must be complemented by quality. DepEd Order No. 81, s. 2009 institutionalized teacher training and professional development programs, emphasizes the need for specialized competencies in Multigrade pedagogy, including differentiated instruction, multi-level lesson planning, and classroom management.

Curriculum-related policies further support the implementation of Multigrade education. Under the K to 12 Basic Education Program and reinforced by DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019, teachers are required to adopt clustered and differentiated curriculum approaches. This involves integrating learning competencies across grade levels and designing instruction that accommodates diverse learner needs within a single classroom setting. The MATATAG Curriculum reforms further reinforce this approach by prioritizing essential competencies and promoting adaptive pacing, which are critical in Multigrade environments where instructional time is divided. At the programmatic level, the Multigrade Program in Philippine Education (MPPE) operationalizes these policies, particularly in rural and remote schools. The program provides guidance on instructional planning and strategies, classroom organization, and time management, ensuring that teaching practices are responsive to the unique demands of Multigrade settings. Additionally, policies emphasize the importance of community and administrative support, encouraging collaboration among school leaders, local government units, and stakeholders to sustain program implementation. Despite the presence of comprehensive frameworks, challenges persist in the translation of policy into practice. While policy support and resource allocation are evident at the national level, disparities in local implementation affect the availability of instructional materials, infrastructure, and continuous teacher development opportunities. This gap underscores the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure that policy objectives are effectively realized in actual classroom contexts.

Implementation Realities and the Need to Assess Program Outcomes - While Multigrade education in the Philippines is supported by robust legal and policy frameworks, its implementation at the school level presents a range of practical challenges that directly impact instructional effectiveness and learner outcomes. Central to these challenges is the expanded role of the teacher, who must manage multiple grade levels simultaneously. This requires advanced skills in instructional planning and strategies, including the design of parallel lesson plans, integration of competencies, and application of differentiated instruction. One of the most significant constraints is time management. Teachers must divide limited instructional time among different grade groups, often resulting in reduced direct teaching time and increased reliance on independent or peer-assisted learning activities. While these strategies can enhance learner autonomy, they may also lead to uneven content coverage if not systematically structured and monitored.

The physical organization of the classroom further influences the effectiveness of Multigrade instruction. Ideally, classrooms should be arranged to support simultaneous learning activities, including group work, independent study, and teacher-led instruction. However, many schools, particularly in GIDA contexts, face limitations in space, infrastructure, and access to instructional materials, which constrain optimal classroom organization. Teacher preparation remains a critical issue. Despite existing policies on training, many teachers assigned to Multigrade classes report insufficient preparation in handling multi-level instruction. This often results in reliance on traditional teaching approaches that are not fully aligned with the demands of Multigrade settings. Consequently, the potential benefits of Multigrade education—such as peer learning and flexible pacing—are not

fully realized.

Beyond the classroom, community and administrative support plays a vital role in sustaining implementation. Support from school leaders, local government units, and stakeholders are essential for providing resources, monitoring progress, and addressing operational challenges. However, inconsistencies in such support, coupled with limitations in policy implementation and resource allocation, contribute to disparities in program effectiveness across different schools. Given these realities, there is a pressing need to systematically assess the outcomes of Multigrade education. Existing studies present mixed findings, with some indicating lower academic performance compared to Monograde settings, while others highlight improvements in learner engagement, independence, and social interaction. This variability underscores the importance of context-specific evaluation. Assessment should focus on key educational indicators such as retention rates, academic achievement, and learner engagement, which collectively provide a comprehensive measure of program effectiveness. Evaluating these outcomes not only determines whether Multigrade education is achieving its intended goals but also provides critical insights for improving instructional practices, strengthening teacher preparation, and refining policy implementation.

In this context, the present study is anchored on the need to examine both the implementation and outcomes of Multigrade education in the Philippine setting. By analyzing the interplay of instructional, organizational, and systemic factors, the study aims to generate evidence that can inform policy enhancement, improve classroom practices, and contribute to the broader goal of achieving inclusive and quality education for all.

Objectives **-** The general objective of the study is to examine the implementation and outcomes of the Multigrade Program in Magallanes District. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) determine the level of implementation of the Multigrade Program across the domains of class organization, facilities and resources, curriculum alignment, and teacher support; (2) determine the challenges encountered in the implementation of the Multigrade Program; (3) examine the outcomes of Multigrade Program implementation among learner's progression (promotion rate, dropout rate, repetition rate); and (4) develop a guidebook in the evaluation of Multigrade Program implementation based on the findings of the study.

2. Methodology

This section presents the methodological procedures employed to examine the implementation and outcomes of the Multigrade Program in selected school peripheries. It outlines the research design, sources of data, instruments, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques used to ensure systematic and credible results.

Research Design **-** This study employed a descriptive–qualitative research design to systematically examine the implementation and outcomes of the Multigrade Program in selected school peripheries in Magallanes Districts, Sorsogon Province, in alignment with Decs order 96 s 1997. This design was appropriate as it enabled the researcher to capture actual conditions, practices, and experiences of stakeholders without manipulating variables. The qualitative approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of instructional delivery, organizational structures, resource allocation, and teacher workload within Multigrade settings. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, and field observations, allowing a comprehensive understanding of how the program operates in geographically disadvantaged contexts. Through this approach, the study documented existing practices, assessed policy alignment, and examined learner outcomes and teacher performance. The study utilized frequency and percentage distribution to analyze learner outcome indicators, while thematic and content analysis were applied to qualitative data. Triangulation was employed to validate findings across multiple data sources, ensuring reliability and depth in the interpretation of results.

Sources of Data **-** The study utilized purposive sampling in selecting participants based on their direct involvement in the implementation of the Multigrade Program in identified Multigrade schools in the Magallanes North and South Districts, as guided by Decs order 96 s 1997. The participants of the study consisted of 6 school

heads, 10 Multigrade teachers, and 10 learners who met the established selection criteria. School heads were included because they directly supervise, monitor, and manage the implementation of the Multigrade Program in their respective schools. Multigrade teachers were selected based on their actual teaching experience and active involvement in Multigrade instructional delivery, classroom management, and learner assessment. Learners were included to provide supporting information regarding their learning experiences, participation, and classroom engagement in the Multigrade Program. Learner-related school data were also obtained through records reflecting enrolment, promotion, dropout, and repetition rates.

The inclusion criteria for participants required that school heads and teachers must: (1) be officially assigned in a recognized Multigrade school; (2) have direct involvement in the implementation of the Multigrade Program during the conduct of the study; and (3) be willing to participate in the interview and data-gathering procedures. Learners included in the study were those officially enrolled in Multigrade classes during the school year and whose records were accessible for documentary analysis. The selected participants provided relevant administrative, instructional, and learner-based insights necessary for assessing the implementation of the Multigrade Program in terms of instructional practices, classroom management, supervision, learner participation, and program challenges. Data gathered from interviews, observations, and documentary analysis was triangulated to strengthen the validity and depth of the study findings.

Research Instruments - The study employed a semi-structured interview guide, documentary analysis, and field photo documentations. The semi-structured interview guide served as the primary instrument, designed to elicit detailed responses on classroom organization, instructional strategies, implementation practices, and challenges encountered by teachers and school heads. Documentary analysis was conducted to systematically review school records, including enrolment data, promotion, dropout, and repetition rates, as well as reports related to facilities and program implementation. Field photo documentation, secured with consent, was also utilized to support contextual analysis of classroom environments and resource availability. These instruments ensured alignment with the study's objectives and allowed for triangulation of data.

Data Collection - Data collection was conducted through a systematic and coordinated process composed of pre-collection, during collection, and post-collection protocols to ensure the ethical conduct, accuracy, and validity of the study on the implementation of the Multigrade Program. Prior to the actual data gathering, formal permission was secured from the Schools Division Office of Sorsogon. Coordination was likewise undertaken with district supervisors and school heads of identified Multigrade schools in the Magallanes North and South Districts for approval, scheduling, and access to participants and relevant school documents. During the pre-collection stage, the researcher also explained the purpose, objectives, and scope of the study to the participants and secured informed consent to ensure voluntary participation and confidentiality of responses. Interview guides, observation notes, and documentary checklists were prepared and validated to establish consistency in data gathering procedures.

During the data collection phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with school heads, Multigrade teachers, and selected learners based on their availability to avoid disruption of classes and regular school activities. School heads provided information regarding supervision, monitoring, and program management, while Multigrade teachers shared experiences related to instructional delivery, classroom management, and workload demands. Learners contributed insights regarding classroom participation and learning experiences in the Multigrade setting. Documentary data were also collected from school records, particularly those related to enrolment, promotion, dropout, repetition rates, and other reports relevant to program implementation. Field visits and non-intrusive classroom observations were undertaken to validate interview responses and assess actual classroom conditions and practices. The researcher ensured that proper ethical protocols, confidentiality, and respectful interaction with participants were consistently observed throughout the conduct of the study.

In the post-collection stage, all gathered data were organized, reviewed, and validated to ensure completeness and consistency. Interview responses, observation notes, and documentary records were carefully consolidated for

analysis and triangulation. The researcher maintained confidentiality by properly storing the collected data and ensuring that participant identities were not disclosed in any part of the study. Verification of responses and cross-checking of documentary evidence were likewise conducted to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The entire data collection process was carried out during the second and third quarters of the school year, allowing sufficient time for coordination, validation, and in-depth analysis of the gathered information.

Research Ethics - The study adhered to ethical standards in educational research, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the research process. In compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (R.A. 10173), all information gathered was treated with confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Institutional approval from the Schools Division Office ensured that the study complied with DepEd policies and research protocols. Anonymity of respondents was maintained by removing identifying information during analysis and reporting. The researcher also ensured objectivity by avoiding influence on participants' responses and conducted documentation, including photographs, only with explicit consent and without disrupting school activities.

Data Analysis - Data analysis followed a qualitative–descriptive and document-based analytical framework aligned with the specific objectives of the study on the implementation of the Multigrade Program. The analytical framework served as the basis for organizing, interpreting, and synthesizing data gathered from interviews, documentary analysis, and observations to ensure that each objective was systematically addressed. For Objective 1, which focused on the status of Multigrade Program implementation, documentary data and observation notes were analyzed using content analysis. The analysis concentrated on class organization, school facilities, curriculum implementation, instructional delivery, and support systems to determine the extent of program implementation. For Objective 2, interview responses from teachers, school heads, and other participants were examined through thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns regarding instructional practices, classroom management, and teacher experiences in multigrade classes.

For Objective 3, learner outcomes were analyzed using frequency counts and percentage distribution to describe enrolment, promotion, dropout, retention, and completion rates. These statistical descriptions provided a clearer understanding of learner performance and participation within the Multigrade Program. Meanwhile, for Objective 4, the study utilized coding, categorization, and thematic analysis of interview responses, documentary evidence, and field observations to identify the challenges encountered in the implementation of the Multigrade Program. The findings from this analysis served as the basis for the development of a proposed guidebook containing recommended strategies, practices, and intervention measures intended to support and improve the implementation of Multigrade education. To strengthen the validity and credibility of the findings, triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from interviews, school documents, and observations. The use of the analytical framework ensured that the gathered data directly corresponded to the objectives of the study and enabled the researcher to formulate comprehensive, evidence-based, and objective conclusions regarding the implementation of the Multigrade Program.

3. Results

This section shows and analyzes data from elementary Multigrade teachers, learners and school heads in Magallanes Districts. This chapter focuses on themes and description of the actual data gathered in the field in relation to Decs order 96 s 1997. The results also of this research was guided and supported by documentations and documentary evidences and proofs to deepen the discussion on the implementation and outcome of Multigrade Program in a local setting.

3.1 Implementation of Multigrade Program in Magallanes District

This section discusses the implementation of Multigrade Program in Magallanes Districts. It focuses on the

organization of Multigrade classes involving enrolment trends and teacher allocation, physical facilities, instructional materials used in Multigrade set-up and the incentive systems that were prevalent in several informants MG schools.

Organization of Multigrade Classes - Table 1 presents the class structure of Multigrade classes in Magallanes District across three school years (2022–2025). The data indicate that the most prevalent arrangement is the combination of two contiguous grade levels, with Grades 3 and 4 consistently registering the highest number of Multigrade sections. Other common pairings include Grades 1 and 2, and Grades 2 and 3, suggesting a deliberate effort to cluster learners with closely aligned curricular competencies. The presence of three-grade groupings, such as Grades 1 to 3 and Grades 4 to 6, across all years reflects adaptive strategies employed by schools in response to constraints in enrolment size and teacher availability. These configurations are generally consistent with Decs order 96 s 1997, which recommends limiting Multigrade classes to a maximum of three grade levels.

Table 1
Multigrade Class Composition

Multigrade Level	School Year		
	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
K and G1		2	1
G1 and G2	3	1	2
G2 and G3		2	1
G3 and G4	5	3	4
G4 and G5		1	1
G5 and G6	2	1	1
G1-G3	1	1	1
G4-G6	1	1	1
No. of Schools	(n=6)		

Table 2
Average Multigrade Class Enrolment

Participating School	School Year		
	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Participant 1	17	18	17
Participant 2	8	7	10
Participant 3	18	22	20
Participant 4	18	20	17
Participant 5	27	29	23
Participant 6	31	36	38
Total	119	132	125

Table 2 shows the average Multigrade enrolment per grade level among the six participant schools. The data reveal notable variation, with enrolment ranging from 7 to 38 learners. Lower enrolment figures support the implementation of Multigrade classes as a mechanism for ensuring access to education in low-population areas. Meanwhile, moderate enrolment levels observed in several schools suggest manageable class sizes within the Multigrade setup. However, instances where enrolment reaches up to 36–38 learners indicate that some classes approach or exceed the prescribed maximum of 35 learners under Decs order 96 s 1997. Despite these cases, the majority of schools maintain enrolment within the policy range of 8 to 35 learners, reflecting general compliance while accommodating contextual limitations.

In summary, the findings from Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that class organization in the district is largely policy-aligned but operationally flexible. Schools prioritize two-grade combinations for instructional manageability while utilizing three-grade groupings when necessary. Variations in enrolment further illustrate the challenges of balancing policy standards with on-the-ground realities, particularly in peripheral school settings where learner distribution and resource availability are uneven.

School Plant, Facilities, and Furnitures of Multigrade Classes - This section examines the status of school plant, facilities, and furniture in Multigrade (MG) classes in relation to the provisions of Decs order 96 s 1997. It focuses on infrastructure, instructional resources, and teacher allocation as key inputs that influence the

implementation and effectiveness of Multigrade instruction. Table 3 shows the distribution of selected indicators across six (6) schools. Results indicate that 33% have access to a standard three-room school building, 17% reported availability of Multigrade Instructional Package (MIP) and Minimum Learning Package (MLP), and 50% have adequate teacher item allocation. These figures suggest uneven compliance with policy requirements, particularly in infrastructure and instructional resource provision.

Table 3
Level of Compliance on School Plant, Facilities, and Teacher Provision in Multigrade Schools

School Plant, Facilities, and Furniture of Multigrade Classes	School Year	
	No. of Frequency	Percentage (%)
3-room school-building	2	33%
Textbooks and Instructional Materials: MIP (Multigrade Instructional Package) and MLP (Minimum Learning Package)	1	17%
Teacher Item Allocation/Assigning of Teachers	3	50%
No. of Schools	n=6	

In terms of infrastructure, the limited availability of standard classroom buildings reflects constraints in physical learning environments necessary for Multigrade delivery. On instructional materials, the low access to MIP and MLP indicates a gap in essential tools that support competency-based and multilevel instruction. In contrast, teacher allocation appears relatively sufficient in a number of schools, consistent with the policy directive to prioritize staffing in Multigrade settings.

Enclosure 1 highlights the importance of flexible classroom layouts that allow grouping and regrouping of learners. Field-based documentation confirms the use of clustered seating, mixed arrangements, and learning stations. These practices support differentiated instruction, peer interaction, and independent learning, demonstrating alignment with prescribed Multigrade classroom organization despite limitations in physical space.

Figure 3
Suggested Physical Arrangement/Classroom Lay-out of Multigrade Classrooms (Enclosure 1 Decs order 96 s 1997)

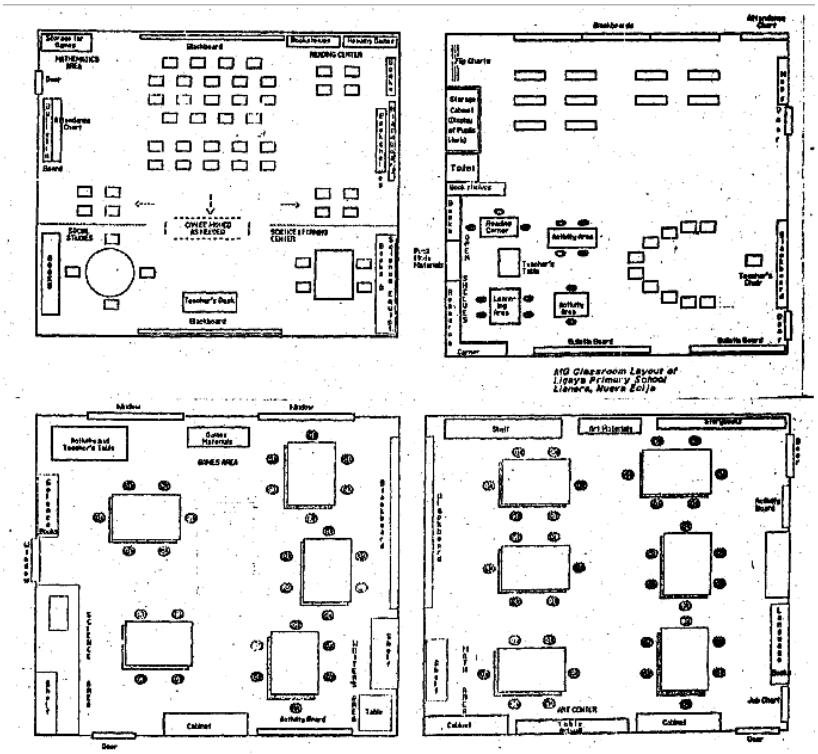
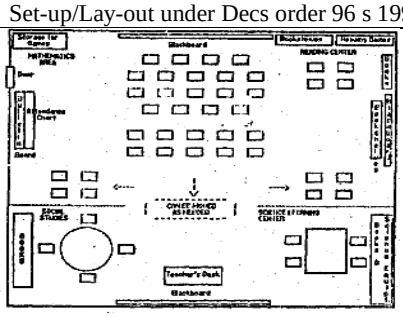
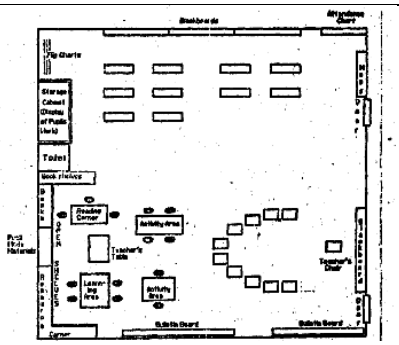
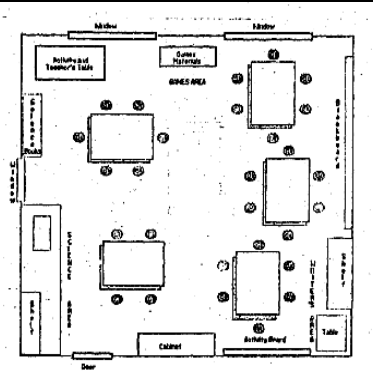
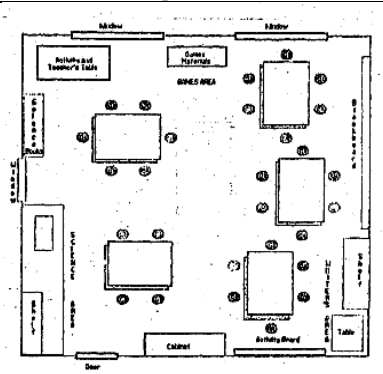


Figure 4
Instructional Lay-Out and Furniture

Suggested Multigrade Classroom Set-up/Lay-out under Decs order 96 s 1997	Actual Instructional Lay-out Observed	Degree of Alignment
 Modified Conventional Class set-up	 Clustered Seating with Learning Centers	High Alignment
 Integrated Instructional Grouping (IIG) of Lower Primary School	 Mixed Group and Row Arrangement	Moderate Alignment
 Multiple Activity Centers Open Area	 Learning Stations/ Centers	High Alignment
 Multiple Activity Centers Open Area	 Group-based Seating Arrangement	Moderate to High Alignment

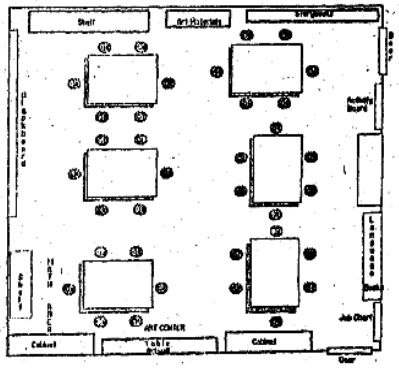
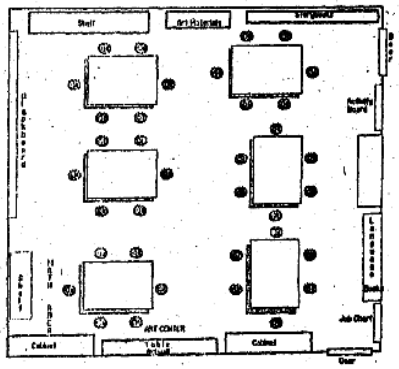
 Self-Contained Classroom		 Flexible/movable seating	Moderate Alignment
 Self-Contained Classroom		 Combination of Rows and Clusters	Moderate Alignment

Figure 4 presents the comparison between the suggested Multigrade classroom lay-outs under Decs order 96 s 1997 and the actual instructional lay-outs observed in the selected classrooms, as supported by the classroom photographs and illustrations shown in Enclosure 1. The findings revealed that the observed classroom arrangements generally adhered to the recommended Multigrade classroom set-ups, although several modifications were implemented depending on classroom conditions, learner population, available furniture, and instructional requirements. The results support the principles of Constructivist Learning Theory of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes that learning becomes more meaningful when learners interact collaboratively within an organized and socially supportive environment. The classroom lay-outs observed in Enclosure 1 demonstrated the importance of flexible and interactive spaces that encourage peer learning, learner participation, and differentiated instruction in Multigrade settings.

The Modified Conventional Class Set-up was reflected in the observed clustered seating with learning centers. As shown in Enclosure 1, the arrangement utilized grouped seating and designated learning spaces that promoted collaboration, learner interaction, and independent activities. This classroom arrangement obtained high alignment with the prescribed Multigrade classroom lay-out because the essential features of clustered and activity-based instruction were evident in the actual classroom set-up. The findings are consistent with the theory of Social Constructivism, which explains that classroom interaction and collaborative activities improve learner engagement and knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978). Likewise, the establishment of learning centers supports learner autonomy and experiential learning, which are important components of Multigrade education.

The Integrated Instructional Grouping (IIG) of Lower Primary School was manifested through the mixed group and row arrangement observed in the classroom. Enclosure 1 illustrated that the classroom combined grouped seating with traditional row arrangements to address varying instructional activities and classroom management needs. However, the degree of alignment was only moderate because the classroom did not fully apply the flexible grouping structure prescribed under the IIG model. This finding supports the Classroom Ecology

Theory of Walter Doyle, which explains that classroom organization and management directly influence learner behavior and instructional effectiveness. The partial implementation of flexible grouping may have resulted from limitations in classroom space, teacher management strategies, and available instructional resources.

The Multiple Activity Centers Open Area set-up was likewise evident in the use of learning stations or centers and group-based seating arrangements shown in Enclosure 1. The photographs demonstrated the presence of activity areas where learners could perform differentiated and collaborative tasks. This arrangement showed moderate to high alignment with the prescribed lay-out because the classroom promoted learner engagement and group interaction, although some limitations in classroom space and furniture organization affected the complete implementation of the open-area concept. The findings support the principles of Differentiated Instruction Theory introduced by Carol Ann Tomlinson, which emphasizes that classroom environments should accommodate diverse learner needs, interests, and readiness levels. The use of activity centers and grouped seating enabled teachers to simultaneously manage learners from different grade levels while facilitating active participation and independent learning.

Meanwhile, the Self-Contained Classroom lay-out was observed through flexible or movable seating arrangements and the combination of rows and clusters. Enclosure 1 showed that teachers utilized movable chairs and clustered seating to facilitate classroom interaction and instructional flexibility. However, the arrangement only achieved moderate alignment because some portions of the classroom still followed conventional row seating due to limited classroom resources and space constraints. This finding is supported by the Implementation Fidelity Theory of Dean Fixsen, which explains that educational programs are often modified during actual implementation due to contextual factors such as resources, infrastructure, and classroom conditions. Although complete adherence to the prescribed Multigrade lay-out was not fully achieved, the observed classrooms still reflected substantial efforts to implement the recommended classroom structures under Decs order 96 s 1997.

Figure 5
Sample Instructional Materials in Multigrade Curriculum and Program

Instructional Material	Description	Utilization	Educational Benefits
	These are teacher-developed or adapted learning resources designed to guide instruction across three grade levels simultaneously. The materials are contextualized to fit the learners' environment and needs, with emphasis on literacy and numeracy.	Used as a primary guide in structuring lessons, integrating activities, and differentiating instruction for varied grade levels within one classroom.	Enhances foundational skills in reading, writing, and mathematics while addressing learning gaps and promoting inclusive learning in Multigrade settings.

Figure 5 presents the sample instructional materials utilized in Multigrade (MG) classes to support the implementation of teaching and learning processes across different grade levels within a single classroom. These instructional materials were developed and contextualized to address the diverse learning needs, abilities, and academic levels of learners in Multigrade settings. The figure further demonstrates how teachers maximize localized and differentiated learning resources to ensure effective lesson delivery, learner engagement, and inclusive education practices. As part of the study, the figure highlights the instructional support mechanisms

employed in implementing the Multigrade Program and their contribution to improving literacy, numeracy, and classroom participation among learners. The specific variable reflected in Figure 5 is Instructional Materials, which falls under the broader variable of Implementation of the Multigrade Program. This variable focuses on the availability, development, utilization, and contextualization of teaching resources used by Multigrade teachers in managing multiple grade levels simultaneously. The figure indicates that the instructional materials serve as primary guides in structuring lessons, integrating differentiated activities, and addressing learning gaps among learners. Moreover, these materials contribute to strengthening foundational competencies in reading, writing, and mathematics while promoting inclusive and learner-centered instruction in Multigrade classrooms.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the availability of instructional materials in Multigrade classrooms is limited, as reflected in Table 3 where only 17% of the sampled schools reported access to the Multigrade Instructional Package (MIP) and Minimum Learning Package (MLP). This suggests that a majority of schools operate with insufficient or improvised learning resources, which may constrain the effective delivery of multilevel instruction. Despite this limitation, responses reveal that teachers maximize available materials by contextualizing content and focusing on core competencies such as literacy and numeracy. These materials, when available, support independent, peer-assisted, and group-based learning, allowing teachers to manage multiple grade levels simultaneously. Consistent with UNESCO (2015), the findings affirm that adequate and context-appropriate instructional materials are critical to sustaining quality education in Multigrade settings, particularly in resource-constrained environments. The results also align with Mulkeen and Higgins (2009), emphasizing that sufficient learning resources contribute to improved learning outcomes and reduced instructional burden. Therefore, the limited provision of instructional materials underscores the need to strengthen resource allocation to ensure more effective and sustainable Multigrade program implementation.

Tables 1 (Multigrade Class Composition) and Table 2 (Average Multigrade Class enrolment), with regards to teacher items and/or assigning teachers, collectively show that Multigrade classes persist despite varying enrolment levels. Table 1 reflects consistent use of two-grade combinations, with a few three-grade groupings, indicating continued teacher load concentration. Table 2 shows that most classes have average enrolment below the 35-learner threshold, except Participant 6, which exceeds the limit in 2023–2024 (36) and 2024–2025 (38). Based on Decs order 96 s 1997, these cases qualify for priority in teacher item allocation. However, the continued presence of Multigrade groupings alongside increasing enrolment in some schools suggests that teacher deployment remains insufficient. Overall, this indicates partial compliance, with allocation not fully addressing high enrolment and multiple-grade teaching demands.

3.2 Multigrade Curriculum and Program

Section IV of Decs order 96 s 1997 indicates that Multigrade classes operate within a prescribed curriculum framework, originally the NESC, while allowing flexible adoption of class program options. In this study, all participating schools are generally using the Figure 6 class program, which reflects a common timetable structure—fixed schedules, parallel subject delivery, and grade-level differentiation within the same time blocks. However, with the transition to the MATATAG Curriculum, adjustments are evident in subject focus, time allocation, and integration of learning areas.

Table 4
Preferred Multigrade Curriculum Structure

Classroom Curriculum Structure under Decs order 96 s 1997	Frequency	Percentage
Subject Staggering	0	0%
Subject Integration	0	0%
Common Timetable	6	100%
Integrated Day	0	0%
Subject Groping	0	0%
No. of Schools	n=6	

Table 4 presents the preferred classroom curriculum structure utilized by the six participating schools based on Section IV of Decs order 96 s 1997. Findings revealed that all participating schools consistently adopted the Common Timetable approach as the dominant Multigrade classroom structure. This indicates that teachers simultaneously handle different grade levels within a unified schedule while providing differentiated activities and outputs according to learners' grade levels and competencies. The use of a common timetable supports organized classroom management, efficient time allocation, and continuity of instruction in Multigrade settings. According to Department of Education through Decs order 96 s 1997, the Common Timetable is designed to maximize instructional time and ensure systematic delivery of lessons in Multigrade classes.

Further analysis of the responses showed that the implementation of the Common Timetable was strengthened through the school heads' Master Class Program, wherein instructional supervision, mentoring, and demonstration teaching were conducted to improve Multigrade teaching practices. Within the preferred curriculum structure, teachers also incorporated Subject Integration and Subject Staggering strategies to effectively manage multiple grade levels. Subject integration enabled the blending of related competencies across learning areas, while subject staggering allowed teachers to alternate direct instruction and independent activities among groups of learners. This practice supports the Social Constructivist Theory of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes collaborative learning, scaffolding, and guided interaction in promoting learners' cognitive development. Likewise, the differentiated management of Multigrade classes reflects the principles of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences of Howard Gardner, which recognizes the diversity of learners' abilities, learning styles, and instructional needs.

Moreover, although Common Timetable emerged as the primary curriculum structure, participating schools occasionally adopted other Multigrade approaches such as Integrated Day and Subject Grouping whenever classroom situations and learner needs required flexibility. This implies that Multigrade teachers continuously adjust instructional delivery depending on class size, learner diversity, available resources, and the demands of classroom management in Multigrade education. The findings also align with the principles of the CIPP Evaluation Model developed by Daniel Stufflebeam, particularly in terms of process evaluation, where instructional strategies and classroom implementation are continuously modified to improve educational delivery and learner outcomes. Furthermore, the observed practices support the Implementation Fidelity Theory, which emphasizes that successful educational implementation depends on the extent to which programs are adapted while still maintaining their intended objectives and standards.

3.3 Support, Welfare and Incentives for Multigrade Teachers

Table 5
Implementation of Support, Welfare, and Incentive Programs for Multigrade Teachers

Indicators	School Year 2022-2023		2023-2024		2024-2025	
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)
Regular Monitoring of MG Classes	0	0%	0	0%	6	100%
Training of MG Teachers	0	0%	2	33%	6	100%
Provision of Lodging Facilities	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Granting of Hardship Allowance	2	33%	2	33%	4	67%
No. of Schools	n=6					

Table 5 reflects a delayed but eventual alignment with the provisions of Decs order 96 s 1997 on support, welfare, and incentives for Multigrade (MG) teachers, with noticeable inconsistencies across indicators. For regular monitoring of MG classes, the zero implementation in SY 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 indicates non-compliance with the mandate for continuous supervision and technical support. This provision explicitly requires sustained monitoring to reinforce instructional quality. The abrupt shift to 100% in SY 2024–2025 suggests a corrective institutional response, likely tied to the normalization of school operations after pandemic disruptions.

In terms of training of MG teachers, the progression from 0% to 33%, and eventually 100%, demonstrates gradual compliance with the requirement for regular in-service training funded through INSET. The initial zero percentage can be reasonably attributed to post-pandemic constraints such as limited face-to-face training, budget

reallocation, and logistical restrictions. The full implementation in the later year signals recovery and prioritization of capacity-building aligned with policy expectations. The provision of lodging facilities remains at 0% across all three school years, indicating persistent non-compliance with the policy's recommendation to provide accommodation for teachers assigned to geographically isolated schools. This suggests structural or funding limitations, as this provision is conditional ("when resources allow"), making it less consistently implemented compared to other mandates.

For the granting of hardship allowance, the data shows partial compliance, increasing from 33% to 67%. While the policy mandates financial incentives such as the Special Hardship Allowance (SHA-MG), the incomplete coverage implies administrative or eligibility constraints. Nonetheless, the upward trend reflects improving adherence to the welfare component of the policy. Overall, the zero percentages in earlier years are best interpreted within the context of post-pandemic academic adjustments, where schools prioritized basic reopening operations, health protocols, and learning recovery over full policy implementation. As conditions stabilized, there was a marked increase in compliance, particularly in monitoring and training, which are more operationally feasible than infrastructure-dependent provisions like lodging.

3.4 Challenges on the Implementation of Multigrade Program

The themes presented in the table were organized according to the four variables under Objective 1 of the study on the implementation of the Multigrade program in Magallanes District, Sorsogon. The thematic categorization reflects the key dimensions of Multigrade implementation, namely: organization of Multigrade classes; school plant, facilities, and furniture; Multigrade curriculum and program; and support, welfare, and incentive programs for Multigrade teachers. These themes emerged from the responses of participants and served as the basis for analyzing the prevailing conditions and challenges encountered in Multigrade education.

Table 6

Challenges Encountered on the Implementation of Multigrade Program

Themes	Description	Sample Responses
Teacher Workload and Classroom Management Burden	Managing multiple grade levels results in heavy workload, multitasking, and difficulty in maintaining effective classroom control.	"These structures succeed when the teacher is well prepared and materials are clear, but they fail when there is not enough support and too many tasks for one teacher. "One teacher becomes overloaded, making it hard to address all learners equally." "Teachers face complex classroom management challenges outside the traditional paradigm."
Scheduling Conflicts and Time Constraints	Simultaneous teaching of different curricula leads to overlapping schedules and insufficient time for each group.	"Scheduling conflicts arise because of overlapping instructional times, different curriculum requirements, and limited time for individualized support." "One teacher must handle different lessons and activities at the same time." "The teacher must allocate time between direct teaching and independent work for other grade levels, creating constant conflict in attention."
Inadequate Classroom Space and Layout	Limited and poorly arranged spaces restrict movement, grouping, and effective Multigrade instruction.	"The physical layout of the MG classroom can hinder effective teaching when there is not enough space to separate groups and the classroom is not organized for smooth learning rotations." "A small or crowded classroom makes it hard to separate grade levels and manage activities." "A cramped or poorly arranged classroom makes it hard to run simultaneous activities for different grade levels."
Lack of Appropriate Furniture and Resources	Schools lack flexible and sufficient furniture due to budget constraints and single-grade-oriented designs.	"Schools sometimes lack suitable furniture because of limited budget and slow supply of materials." "Schools lack flexible furniture for Multigrade set-ups. " "Traditional schools are designed for single-grade classes, which limits appropriate furniture for Multigrade classrooms."

Poor Maintenance and Insufficient Budget Allocation	Inadequate maintenance and limited funding create unsafe and unconducive learning environments.	"Inadequate maintenance creates unsafe, uncomfortable, and distracting environments for learners." "Poorly maintained classrooms and facilities make teaching harder and less comfortable." "Budgets are insufficient because schools have many needs but limited funds to cover everything."
Misalignment of MATATAG Curriculum	The curriculum is designed for single-grade settings, requiring extensive modification for Multigrade use.	"Teachers face difficulties in contextualizing the curriculum because it is designed for single-grade settings." "There is difficulty in aligning content across the grade levels being handled." "The curriculum requires flexible, differentiated, and context-sensitive approaches for Multigrade settings."
Uneven Learning Outcomes	Diverse learner needs and limited time result in gaps in mastery and inconsistent performance.	"Some students are confused or left behind while others are not challenged enough." "This situation can lead to gaps in foundational knowledge." "Students have a wide range of ages, abilities, and developmental stages, making it difficult to address all needs."
Difficulty in Assessment Standardization	Standardized assessments fail to accurately measure varied competencies across grade levels.	"Standardized assessments are designed for single-grade classrooms, which makes them difficult to apply in Multigrade settings." "The same test may be too easy for some and too hard for others." "Different learning paces make it hard to measure student progress accurately."
Inadequate Incentives	Incentives do not proportionately compensate the workload and complexity of Multigrade teaching.	"Incentives are perceived as inadequate because they do not match the high demands, specialized skills, and challenges of Multigrade teaching." "They do not match the extra work and responsibilities teachers face." "Compensation does not match the demands of teaching multiple grade levels in one class."
Welfare Programs Not Responsive	Existing programs provide general support but fail to address workload and instructional demands.	"Programs fail because they focus only on general support rather than the unique challenges of Multigrade teaching." "They do not fully recognize the extra effort needed to teach different grade levels simultaneously." "Support focuses on financial assistance but not on reducing workload or providing additional teaching support."
Policy–Practice Gap	Gaps persist between policy provisions and actual implementation in Multigrade contexts.	"Programs are not truly focused on Multigrade implementation." "The government still prioritizes single-grade class structures." "Some provisions on welfare and training are not fully implemented."

The data in Table 6 present a consolidated view of the challenges encountered by teachers in the implementation of the Multigrade program. These challenges reflect both instructional and systemic constraints, indicating that while Multigrade education serves as a practical response to resource limitations; its execution introduces significant pedagogical, organizational, and policy-related complexities. The themes derived from teachers' responses highlight recurring issues in classroom management, curriculum alignment, resource adequacy, and institutional support, all of which influence the effectiveness of program delivery and learner outcomes. The findings reveal that heterogeneous grouping and instructional complexity remain central concerns. Teachers are required to manage learners across multiple grade levels with varying abilities, which increases the demand for differentiated instruction and strategic lesson planning. This condition complicates instructional delivery, as teachers must simultaneously address diverse competencies within a limited timeframe.

Closely related to this is the issue of teacher workload and classroom management burden. The data indicate that Multigrade teachers experience task overload due to the need to handle multiple curricula, prepare varied instructional materials, and maintain classroom control. This aligns with the structural demands of Multigrade teaching, where one teacher assumes responsibilities typically distributed among several educators in single-grade settings. Scheduling conflicts and time constraints further intensify these challenges. Teachers must divide instructional time among different grade levels, often leading to insufficient attention for each group. This

fragmented allocation of time results in reduced opportunities for individualized instruction and reinforces difficulties in maintaining instructional continuity.

Physical and material limitations also emerge as significant barriers. Inadequate classroom space and layout restrict effective grouping and movement, while the lack of appropriate furniture and resources reflects systemic deficiencies in school provisioning. These conditions are compounded by poor maintenance and insufficient budget allocation, which collectively create learning environments that are not conducive to effective Multigrade instruction. Curricular concerns are particularly evident in the misalignment of the MATATAG Curriculum with Multigrade contexts. The curriculum's design for single-grade implementation requires teachers to make extensive modifications, increasing preparation time and instructional complexity. This misalignment contributes to uneven learning outcomes, where variations in learner readiness and limited instructional time result in gaps in mastery and inconsistent academic performance.

Assessment practices also pose challenges, particularly in terms of standardization. The use of uniform assessment tools fails to capture the diverse learning levels present in Multigrade classrooms, making it difficult to accurately measure student progress and achievement. Beyond instructional issues, the study identifies concerns related to teacher motivation and support. Inadequate incentives and non-responsive welfare programs suggest that existing support mechanisms do not sufficiently account for the demands of Multigrade teaching. Teachers perceive a mismatch between compensation and workload, which may affect job satisfaction and performance.

Finally, a policy–practice gap is evident. Although frameworks such as Decs order 96 s 1997 provide guidelines for Multigrade implementation, the data indicate inconsistencies in execution at the school level. This gap underscores the need for stronger alignment between policy provisions and actual classroom conditions. Overall, the results suggest that the challenges in Multigrade program implementation are multidimensional, encompassing instructional, environmental, and institutional factors. Addressing these issues requires integrated interventions that include curriculum adaptation, resource allocation, teacher support mechanisms, and stricter policy enforcement to enhance the effectiveness of Multigrade education.

3.5 Outcomes of Multigrade Program along Learner's Progression

This section presents the learner progression outcomes of the Multigrade (MG) program in six participating schools, focusing on promotion, completion, drop-out, and repetition rates across three school years (SY 2022–2023 to SY 2024–2025). The analysis specifically covers Multigrade learners only, excluding Monograde enrollees, as delineated in Tables 1 and 2 of this study which establish the class structure and enrolment distribution of MG classes. This delimitation ensures that the findings accurately reflect the internal efficiency and learning movement within Multigrade settings rather than the overall school population. The four parameters were selected because they directly measure learner flow within the system—entry, persistence, progression, and exit—making them appropriate indicators of Multigrade program outcomes. Promotion and completion rates capture upward movement and successful grade-level attainment, while drop-out and repetition rates reflect inefficiencies in retention and progression. In contrast, failure rate was not emphasized due to its limited variability under pandemic assessment policies, where leniency reduced recorded failures. Similarly, net enrolment rate was excluded as it primarily measures access and participation, not the progression dynamics of learners already within the Multigrade system.

Table 7
Learner Progression Outcomes Across Six Multigrade Schools

Outcomes	School Year 2022-2023		2023-2024		2024-2025	
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)
Promotion Rate	5	83.33%	5	83.33%	6	100.00%
Completion Rate	4	66.67%	5	83.33%	6	100.00%
Drop-out Rate	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Repetition Rate	1	16.67%	1	16.67%	0	0.00%
No. of Schools	(n=6)					

As shown in Table 7, promotion rates remained consistently high, increasing from 83.33% in SY 2022–2023 and SY 2023–2024 to 100% in SY 2024–2025. This indicates that most Multigrade learners advanced to the next grade level despite constraints in instructional delivery. The pattern is consistent with pandemic-era academic adjustments, where self-learning modules (SLMs), flexible grading, and targeted remediation under alternative delivery modes (ADM) supported learner progression in GIDA contexts such as the Magallanes district. Completion rates improved from 66.67% to 100% over the three-year period, suggesting that more Multigrade learners were able to reach terminal grade requirements. This upward trend reflects strengthened learner support mechanisms, including modular instruction, home visitation, and localized instructional interventions commonly employed in remote schools.

Drop-out rates remained at 0.00% across all years. While this suggests strong retention among Multigrade learners, it should be interpreted cautiously. During the pandemic, schools adopted inclusive tracking and retrieval systems for modules, ensuring that learners remained officially enrolled even with irregular participation. This ADM-driven approach effectively minimized recorded drop-outs in geographically isolated areas. Repetition rates decreased from 16.67% in SY 2022–2023 and SY 2023–2024 to 0.00% in SY 2024–2025. This decline reflects a shift toward progression with remediation rather than grade retention. In Multigrade classrooms, teachers applied differentiated and flexible instructional strategies through modules, allowing learners to achieve minimum competencies without being formally retained. Overall, the results indicate that Multigrade learners demonstrated favorable progression outcomes under constrained and flexible learning conditions. However, the consistently high promotion and zero drop-out rates likely reflect policy and contextual adjustments associated with ADM implementation, rather than purely independent gains in learner performance.

3.6 Evaluation Guidebook for Multigrade Program

The proposed Evaluation Guidebook for the Multigrade Program is a structured, context-responsive tool developed from the empirical results of this study. It translates the identified implementation conditions, challenges, and learner outcomes into a practical framework for assessing and improving Multigrade (MG) education in schools, particularly within resource-constrained contexts such as the Magallanes District. Grounded on the findings presented in the Results section, the guidebook is anchored on four core evaluation domains: (1) class organization and enrolment structure, (2) school plant, facilities, and instructional resources, (3) curriculum implementation and instructional delivery, and (4) teacher support, welfare, and incentives, with an additional outcome-based component focusing on learner progression indicators.

First, the guidebook incorporates standards for class organization, reflecting the observed predominance of two-grade combinations and occasional three-grade groupings (Tables 1 and 2). It provides criteria for evaluating compliance with recommended class size (8–35 learners) and appropriateness of grade-level clustering. This ensures that schools can systematically assess whether their class structuring aligns with policy while remaining adaptable to enrolment realities. Second, under school facilities and instructional resources, the guidebook addresses the uneven compliance identified in Table 3, particularly the limited availability of standard classrooms and Multigrade instructional packages. It includes indicators for evaluating physical learning environments, such as classroom space, ventilation, and flexibility of furniture, as well as the presence and utilization of contextualized instructional materials. It also emphasizes observable practices like learning stations, clustered seating, and movable furniture, which were documented as effective compensatory strategies.

Third, the guidebook evaluates instructional delivery and curriculum adaptation, taking into account the transition from NESC to the MATATAG Curriculum. It provides benchmarks for assessing strategies such as subject staggering, integration, and differentiated instruction within a common timetable structure (Figure 6). This component ensures that teaching practices are not only policy-aligned but also responsive to the complexity of handling multiple grade levels simultaneously. Fourth, a dedicated section assesses teacher support systems, based on the inconsistencies identified in Table 4. It includes indicators on the presence of monitoring mechanisms, access to training, provision of incentives (e.g., hardship allowance), and availability of welfare support. This

domain directly responds to the documented gaps in institutional support and the need for sustained capacity-building for MG teachers.

In addition, the guidebook integrates a learner progression monitoring tool, anchored on the four key indicators—promotion, completion, drop-out, and repetition rates (Table 6). These metrics allow schools to evaluate internal efficiency specific to Multigrade learners, ensuring that assessment focuses on actual learner movement within the MG system rather than overall school performance. The consistently high promotion and completion rates, alongside zero drop-out and declining repetition, are contextualized within flexible learning policies, enabling more accurate interpretation of outcomes. Furthermore, the guidebook is designed to be diagnostic and prescriptive. It not only identifies the level of compliance or performance across domains but also provides corresponding recommendations aligned with the challenges identified in Table 5—such as addressing instructional complexity, improving classroom layout, enhancing resource provision, and aligning curriculum implementation with Multigrade realities. Overall, the Evaluation Guidebook serves as a localized, evidence-based management tool that bridges the gap between policy (Decs order 96 s 1997) and actual school practice. It enables school heads, teachers, and supervisors to systematically assess Multigrade implementation, identify gaps, and guide data-driven interventions aimed at improving both instructional quality and learner outcomes in Multigrade settings.

4. Discussions

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the findings in relation to the study objectives, focusing on the implementation, challenges, outcomes, and evaluation of the Multigrade (MG) Program in Magallanes District. It examines how key parameters—such as class organization, enrolment, school facilities, instructional resources, curriculum delivery, and teacher support systems—collectively influence program implementation. The discussion further explores the instructional, environmental, and policy-related challenges encountered, as well as learner progression outcomes in terms of promotion, completion, drop-out, and repetition. Anchored on Decs order 96 s 1997 and supported by relevant literature, this section derives meaning from the observed patterns and provides implications for policy enhancement, instructional practice, and continuous improvement of the Multigrade program.

4.1 Interpretation and Implications of Multigrade Program Implementation

The implementation of the Multigrade (MG) Program in Magallanes District reflects a policy-informed yet context-driven approach to basic education delivery. Anchored on Decs order 96 s 1997, the findings indicate that schools organize Multigrade classes primarily in response to low and uneven enrolment, limited teacher items, and constrained school resources. As presented in Tables 1 and 2, the prevailing structure involves combining two contiguous grade levels, particularly Grades 3 and 4, with occasional three-grade groupings. This configuration adheres to policy provisions while operationalizing the principle of curricular proximity, wherein learners with similar competencies are grouped to support instructional efficiency.

The meaning of these patterns suggests that Multigrade implementation is both structural and pedagogical. The clustering of adjacent grade levels facilitates differentiated instruction and manageable lesson delivery across multiple curricula. This supports Little (2006), who emphasized that effective Multigrade teaching depends on strategic learner grouping and instructional organization. However, the presence of three-grade combinations reflects operational flexibility, indicating that schools extend beyond prescribed standards to accommodate contextual limitations. Berry (2001) similarly noted that Multigrade teaching often emerges as a pragmatic response to resource scarcity rather than a strictly planned model. Enrolment patterns further clarify this condition. While most classes fall within the recommended range of 8–35 learners, instances exceeding this threshold—such as enrolment reaching up to 38 learners—indicate systemic pressure . This implies that Multigrade classes are maintained even under conditions that may already justify additional teacher deployment or class restructuring. The implication is increased teacher workload and potential dilution of instructional quality. Mulkeen and Higgins

(2009) argued that larger class sizes in Multigrade settings heighten instructional complexity and limit individualized learner support. In terms of school plant, facilities, and instructional materials, the findings indicate partial compliance with policy requirements. Only 33% of schools meet the standard for three-room buildings, and only 17% reported access to essential instructional packages such as the Multigrade Instructional Package (MIP) and Minimum Learning Package (MLP). The meaning of these findings points to uneven enabling conditions for effective Multigrade delivery. While teacher allocation appears relatively adequate, the imbalance between human and material resources constrains the full implementation of Multigrade pedagogy.

The implications are direct. Limited infrastructure affects classroom organization, a critical component in Multigrade instruction where simultaneous teaching occurs. Similarly, insufficient instructional materials restrict the implementation of differentiated, independent, and peer-assisted learning strategies. Despite these constraints, classroom evidence presented in Figure 4 demonstrates the use of clustered seating, learning stations, and flexible layouts. These practices indicate adaptive teaching and align with Lackney (2008), who asserted that flexible classroom environments enhance learner engagement and classroom management. Little (2006) further emphasized that spatial organization supports the rotation of teacher attention across multiple learner groups. However, these adaptive practices also reveal a compensatory mode of implementation. Teachers rely on contextualized and improvised materials to address resource gaps. As reflected in Figure 5, instructional materials are often teacher-developed and focused on literacy and numeracy. While this approach strengthens foundational competencies, it introduces variability in instructional quality across schools. UNESCO (2015) underscores that adequate and context-appropriate instructional materials are essential to sustaining quality education in Multigrade settings. Similarly, Mulkeen and Higgins (2009) emphasized that sufficient learning resources reduce instructional burden and improve learning outcomes.

Curricular implementation reflects a transition from the NESC framework toward the MATATAG Curriculum. The continued use of common timetables, subject staggering, and integration—illustrated in Figure 6 —indicates structural continuity, while the shift toward fewer subjects and prioritization of literacy and numeracy signifies curricular refinement. The meaning of this transition is a move toward focused competency development and reduced fragmentation of instruction. Its implication is improved depth of learning, although it requires enhanced teacher capacity to manage integrated and multilevel instruction. This aligns with UNESCO (2015), which advocates for streamlined curricula to improve coherence and efficiency in Multigrade education. Support, welfare, and incentives for Multigrade teachers show delayed but improving compliance. As indicated in Table 4, monitoring and training reached full implementation in the most recent period, while hardship allowance remains partially implemented and lodging provision is absent. The earlier lack of implementation may be attributed to post-pandemic adjustments, where operational priorities shifted toward school reopening and learning recovery. The implication is that teacher support systems were initially reactive rather than institutionalized. Berry (2001) emphasized that sustained professional and institutional support is critical in Multigrade settings due to the complexity of managing multiple grade levels simultaneously.

Overall, the implementation of the Multigrade Program in Magallanes District is best characterized as policy-aligned but resource-constrained and adaptation-driven. While schools generally comply with structural and curricular provisions, actual implementation is shaped by contextual realities such as enrolment variability, infrastructure limitations, and insufficient instructional materials. The findings imply that access to education is maintained through Multigrade strategies. However, the quality and consistency of instruction rely heavily on teacher adaptability. Strengthening infrastructure, improving resource allocation, and institutionalizing sustained teacher support are necessary to transition from compensatory practices toward a more standardized and effective Multigrade program.

4.2 Instructional and Systemic Constraints in Multigrade Program Implementation

The challenges identified in the implementation of the Multigrade (MG) Program reflect a convergence of pedagogical, organizational, and policy-related constraints that directly influence instructional quality and learner

outcomes. Grounded in the provisions of Decs order 96 s 1997, the findings suggest that while MG education is designed as a pragmatic response to limited resources, its effectiveness is contingent upon the alignment between theoretical principles of Multigrade teaching and actual classroom conditions. From a theoretical standpoint, MG instruction is anchored on differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2014), constructivist learning (Vygotsky, 1978), and flexible grouping strategies, all of which assume adequate teacher preparation, sufficient resources, and supportive institutional structures. However, the results indicate that these enabling conditions are only partially realized in practice, thereby creating a gap between intended and actual implementation.

A key issue emerging from the findings is the complexity of heterogeneous grouping, which intensifies instructional demands. Theoretically, Multigrade classrooms benefit from peer-assisted learning and vertical curriculum integration, where learners of varying levels support each other's development (Little, 2006). This aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, where social interaction facilitates learning progression. However, the present findings show that instead of functioning as a pedagogical advantage, heterogeneity often becomes a source of instructional strain due to limited scaffolding mechanisms and insufficient instructional materials. This indicates that without structured support systems, the theoretical benefits of mixed-ability grouping are not fully realized in actual MG settings.

The issue of teacher workload and classroom management burden further illustrates the tension between theory and practice. Multigrade pedagogy assumes that teachers are equipped with specialized competencies in time management, curriculum integration, and differentiated instruction (Berry, 2010). In contrast, the findings reveal that teachers experience task overload, as they simultaneously handle multiple curricula, prepare varied instructional materials, and manage diverse learner needs. This aligns with the observations of Cornish (2006), who noted that MG teaching often leads to role intensification when institutional support is lacking. The implication is that while MG teaching is theoretically manageable through strategic planning, in practice, insufficient training and support convert it into a high-burden instructional model.

Scheduling conflicts and time constraints further demonstrate this misalignment. Theoretical models of MG instruction emphasize rotational teaching and independent learning stations to optimize instructional time (Little, 2001). However, the findings indicate that teachers struggle to balance direct instruction and independent tasks across grade levels, resulting in fragmented teaching. This supports the argument of Miller (1991) that effective time allocation in MG settings requires structured routines and adequate instructional resources—conditions that are not consistently present in the studied context. Consequently, limited instructional time contributes to gaps in learner mastery and continuity.

Physical and material constraints also reveal a misalignment between policy expectations and actual school conditions. Decs order 96 s 1997 prescribes adequate facilities and learning resources to support MG instruction; however, the findings indicate persistent inadequacies in classroom space, furniture, and instructional materials. From a theoretical perspective, flexible learning environments are essential in MG classrooms to facilitate grouping, movement, and activity-based learning (UNESCO, 2015). The absence of such conditions constrains the application of learner-centered approaches, thereby reinforcing more traditional, less effective teaching practices. This suggests that infrastructure limitations directly undermine the pedagogical principles underlying MG education.

Curricular misalignment, particularly with the MATATAG Curriculum, further highlights systemic inconsistencies. While the curriculum is grounded in competency-based progression and contextualized learning, it remains largely structured for single-grade implementation. Theoretically, MG curricula should adopt spiral and integrated designs to accommodate multiple grade levels simultaneously (Little, 2006). However, the findings reveal that teachers must independently modify and align content, increasing preparation demands and risking inconsistencies in delivery. This contributes to uneven learning outcomes, as learners experience varying levels of depth and coherence in instruction.

Assessment practices also reflect a gap between theoretical standards and actual application. Effective

assessment in MG settings requires flexible, formative, and differentiated approaches that capture diverse learning trajectories (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In contrast, the reliance on standardized assessments designed for single-grade contexts limits the validity of measuring learner performance in MG classrooms. The findings confirm that such practices fail to account for differences in pacing and competency levels, thereby affecting the accuracy of instructional decisions and reported outcomes.

Beyond instructional dimensions, the findings underscore issues in teacher motivation and institutional support. Theoretically, incentive structures and welfare programs are expected to enhance teacher performance and retention (Herzberg, 1966). However, the perceived inadequacy of incentives and the lack of MG-specific support mechanisms suggest a misalignment between policy provisions and teacher needs. This condition may lead to reduced motivation and job satisfaction, which, as supported by motivational theory, can negatively impact instructional effectiveness.

Finally, the policy–practice gap evident in the findings highlights a critical implementation issue. While Decs order 96 s 1997 provides a comprehensive framework for MG education, its inconsistent execution at the school level reflects limitations in monitoring, resource allocation, and contextual adaptation. This supports the argument of Fullan (2007) that educational reform is often constrained not by policy design but by the complexities of implementation. The findings suggest that without sustained institutional support and localized strategies, policy intentions remain only partially realized.

Overall, the challenges identified in demonstrate that the effectiveness of the Multigrade Program is shaped by the degree of alignment between theoretical foundations and actual practice. The persistence of instructional, environmental, and systemic constraints indicates the need for integrated interventions that strengthen teacher capacity, improve resource provision, adapt curriculum and assessment systems, and ensure stricter policy implementation. Bridging this gap is essential to enhance both the functionality and sustainability of Multigrade education.

4.3 Analysis of Learner Progression in Multigrade Classes

The learner progression outcomes in the Multigrade (MG) program—examined through promotion, completion, drop-out, and repetition rates—show a consistent pattern of favorable movement across the three school years. Promotion and completion rates reached full attainment by SY 2024–2025, while drop-out remained at zero and repetition was eliminated. These results indicate that learners in MG settings were able to advance and complete grade-level requirements despite the inherent complexities of Multigrade instruction. In substantive terms, this reflects a high level of internal efficiency, where learner flow within the system is maintained with minimal attrition. However, these outcomes are not solely attributable to instructional effectiveness; they also reflect systemic adjustments in curriculum delivery, assessment, and learner support mechanisms implemented during the post-pandemic period.

From an instructional standpoint, the findings suggest that adaptive pedagogies characteristic of Multigrade teaching—such as differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, and modular learning—played a central role in sustaining learner progression. Multigrade classrooms require teachers to manage varied competency levels simultaneously, and effective scaffolding becomes critical in ensuring that learners meet minimum standards for advancement. This aligns with Little (2006), who emphasized that Multigrade effectiveness depends largely on teacher capacity to individualize instruction within a shared learning space. The observed increase in completion rates further implies that targeted interventions, including remediation and home-based support, contributed to learners' ability to meet terminal requirements. These practices are consistent with established approaches in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas, where instructional flexibility is necessary to address access and continuity issues (Berry, 2011).

At the same time, the zero drop-out rate and declining repetition rates indicate strong retention mechanisms embedded within the program. Systems such as module distribution and retrieval, learner tracking, and home

visitation appear to have minimized learner disengagement. However, these indicators require careful interpretation. During the implementation of Alternative Delivery Modes (ADM), policies emphasized learner inclusion and continuity, often accompanied by flexible assessment standards. As a result, progression indicators may reflect policy-driven leniency rather than strict measures of academic mastery. UNESCO (2021) reported similar trends globally, where promotion rates increased due to relaxed evaluation criteria aimed at preventing large-scale learning discontinuity during the pandemic. In this context, the absence of repetition and drop-out may signal administrative efficiency rather than a complete absence of learning gaps.

Supporting studies reinforce this interpretation. Blum and Diwan (2007) found that Multigrade programs can sustain participation and progression in resource-constrained settings, but highlighted the need to balance access with quality assurance. In the Philippine setting, SEAMEO INNOTECH (2012) noted that while MG programs effectively address enrolment and retention challenges, monitoring of actual learning outcomes remains essential. Furthermore, Guskey (2010) argued that reducing repetition in favor of remediation can be beneficial, provided that instructional support is sufficient to address competency deficits. The decline in repetition observed in the present findings aligns with this shift toward remediation-based progression, where learners are advanced with concurrent support rather than being retained.

Overall, the progression patterns demonstrate that the MG program is effective in maintaining learner movement through the education system under flexible and constrained conditions. The results point to the strength of adaptive teaching strategies and retention-focused policies in ensuring continuity of learning. However, they also highlight a critical consideration: high progression rates must be interpreted alongside the quality of learning achieved. Without parallel measures of competency attainment, there is a risk of overestimating program effectiveness. This underscores the need for strengthened assessment frameworks that can more accurately capture the relationship between progression and actual learning outcomes in Multigrade contexts.

4.4 Evaluation Guidebook for Multigrade Program: A Context-Responsive Framework for Assessment and Improvement

The Evaluation Guidebook for the Multigrade (MG) Program emerges as a direct translation of the study's empirical findings into a structured, operational tool for school-level assessment and decision-making. Anchored on the conditions of implementation, instructional constraints, and learner progression outcomes identified in the preceding results, the guidebook operationalizes these variables into measurable indicators. It is designed not merely as a compliance checklist but as a context-sensitive instrument that captures the realities of MG classrooms, particularly in geographically isolated and resource-limited settings. In doing so, it aligns institutional standards with ground-level practices, thereby addressing the persistent gap between policy prescriptions and actual implementation.

Central to the guidebook is a multi-domain evaluation structure that reflects the critical dimensions of MG program delivery. The first domain—class organization and enrolment structure—establishes criteria for assessing grade-level clustering and class size configurations. This directly responds to the observed prevalence of two-grade combinations and occasional three-grade groupings, ensuring that class structuring remains both policy-compliant and contextually feasible. By embedding flexibility within prescribed standards, the guidebook acknowledges enrolment variability while maintaining instructional manageability.

The second domain focuses on school plant, facilities, and instructional resources. This component translates the documented inconsistencies in infrastructure and material provision into concrete evaluation indicators. It assesses not only the availability of physical resources—such as classrooms, ventilation, and furniture—but also their functional adaptability to MG instruction. Emphasis is placed on observable pedagogical arrangements, including learning stations, clustered seating, and modular classroom layouts, which function as adaptive strategies in resource-constrained environments. This shifts evaluation from mere resource presence to effective utilization, a critical distinction in MG contexts.

The third domain addresses curriculum implementation and instructional delivery. It integrates benchmarks that reflect both traditional MG strategies and contemporary curricular reforms, particularly the transition to the MATATAG Curriculum. Evaluation indicators include subject staggering, integration techniques, and differentiated instruction within unified timetables. This ensures that instructional practices are examined not only for alignment with national standards but also for their responsiveness to the inherent complexity of teaching multiple grade levels simultaneously. The guidebook thus reinforces pedagogical coherence while accommodating instructional flexibility.

The fourth domain examines teacher support, welfare, and institutional backing. Grounded in the identified gaps in monitoring, training, and incentives, this section introduces indicators that assess systemic support mechanisms. These include access to professional development, availability of supervision, provision of hardship allowances, and overall teacher welfare. By incorporating this domain, the guidebook recognizes that instructional effectiveness in MG settings is contingent not only on teacher competence but also on sustained institutional support structures.

Complementing these domains is an outcome-based component that centers on learner progression indicators—promotion, completion, drop-out, and repetition rates. These metrics provide a focused measure of internal efficiency specific to MG learners, rather than generalized school-wide performance. The integration of these indicators allows for a more precise interpretation of learner movement within the MG system, particularly in light of flexible learning policies that may influence traditional performance trends. This ensures that evaluation remains both data-driven and contextually grounded.

Notably, the guidebook adopts both diagnostic and prescriptive functions. Beyond identifying levels of compliance or performance, it systematically links observed gaps to targeted recommendations. These include strategies for addressing instructional complexity, optimizing classroom organization, enhancing resource allocation, and strengthening curriculum alignment. Such dual functionality positions the guidebook as an actionable management tool rather than a static evaluative document.

Overall, the Evaluation Guidebook constitutes a localized, evidence-based framework that bridges policy directives—particularly those outlined in Decs order 96 s 1997—and the operational realities of Multigrade education. It enables school heads, teachers, and supervisors to conduct systematic, data-informed evaluations, thereby facilitating responsive interventions that enhance both instructional delivery and learner outcomes. In this regard, the guidebook not only reflects the findings of the study but also extends their utility into sustainable program improvement.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

The study concluded that the implementation of the Multigrade (MG) Program in Magallanes District generally adheres to Decs order 96 s 1997 despite existing contextual limitations. Schools commonly implemented two-grade combinations, with occasional three-grade groupings due to enrolment variations and limited teacher items. Although teacher allocation was relatively adequate, shortages in classrooms, instructional facilities, and Multigrade learning materials remained evident. To address these challenges, teachers utilized flexible classroom arrangements, contextualized materials, curriculum integration, and adaptive instructional strategies to sustain learning delivery in Multigrade settings. Findings also revealed favorable learner outcomes, including high promotion and completion rates, zero drop-out incidence, and declining repetition rates. However, these results were also influenced by post-pandemic educational adjustments such as flexible assessment and Alternative Delivery Modes. Overall, the Multigrade Program continues to provide access and continuity of education for learners in resource-limited communities, although issues related to instructional complexity, inadequate resources, and policy–practice gaps still affect the consistency and quality of implementation.

It is recommended that the Department of Education strengthen support systems for Multigrade schools through improved infrastructure, adequate instructional materials, and sufficient classroom facilities. Teacher

deployment should also be optimized to reduce workload in schools with high enrolment. In addition, continuous professional development programs focusing on differentiated instruction, curriculum integration, and classroom management should be regularly conducted to improve teacher competence in Multigrade teaching. Furthermore, the MATATAG Curriculum may be further contextualized for Multigrade settings through structured guides for curriculum integration and assessment adaptation. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should also be strengthened to ensure effective implementation of teacher support programs and learner assessment systems. Finally, the developed Evaluation Guidebook for the Multigrade Program may be utilized by school heads, teachers, and supervisors as a practical tool for improving instructional delivery, resource management, and policy implementation in Multigrade education.

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