

Multigrade Teachers in Rural Areas: Thoughts to Ponder

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Abstract:- Multigrade teaching, involving a single teacher instructing students from multiple grade levels in a single classroom, is a prevalent approach in rural education. This study delved into the lived experiences of multigrade teachers, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges they encounter, how they cope, and the insights derived from their unique pedagogical environment. Utilizing a qualitative research design, in-depth interviews were conducted with multigrade teachers from diverse rural areas. The participants shared their experiences, shedding light on challenges related to time constraints, limited resources, diverse academic levels, and cultural diversity. Coping mechanisms such as collaborative learning, resource-sharing, flexibility, and continuous professional development were explored. The study identified common challenges faced by multigrade teachers, including time constraints due to instructional demands, limited educational resources, varied academic levels, and cultural diversity. Coping strategies involved collaborative learning, resource-sharing, flexibility, and a commitment to continuous professional development. The findings emphasize the need for tailored support from education officials and administrators to enhance teacher training and resource provision. Collaborative learning emerges as a powerful tool for addressing diverse academic levels and fostering a positive learning environment.

Keywords:- *Multigrade Teaching, Rural Education, Challenges, Coping Strategies, Professional Development, Student Collaboration.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Multigrade teaching is a common practice in many countries, particularly in rural areas where resources are limited, and student populations are small (UNESCO, 2019). Multigrade teachers are responsible for teaching students of different ages, grades, and abilities in a single classroom, which can present a variety of challenges. These challenges may include managing diverse student needs, adapting to different learning styles, and providing individualized instruction to students with varying levels of proficiency (Mudaly, 2019).

Similarly, multigrade teaching is a common practice in many rural areas around the world, where small schools may have only one or a few teachers who are responsible for teaching multiple grade levels. Despite the prevalence of

multigrade teaching, little research has been conducted to understand the experiences of teachers in these settings. However, international studies have highlighted the challenges and opportunities that multigrade teachers face.

For example, a study conducted in Pakistan found that multigrade teachers faced significant challenges in managing the diverse needs of their students, particularly in relation to language and cultural differences (Jabeen & Malik, 2018). Similarly, a study in South Africa found that multigrade teachers faced high levels of workload and stress, which often led to burnout and job dissatisfaction (Tsehloane & Hattingh, 2019).

In the Philippines, multigrade teaching is a common practice in many rural areas, where small schools may have only one or a few teachers who are responsible for teaching multiple grade levels. Despite the prevalence of multigrade teaching, little research has been conducted to understand the experiences of teachers in these settings. However, some studies have highlighted the challenges and opportunities that multigrade teachers face in the Philippine context.

A study conducted in the Northern Philippines found that multigrade teachers faced significant challenges in managing the diverse needs of their students, particularly in relation to their different ages and levels of development (Talla, 2018). Another study in the Visayas region found that multigrade teachers faced challenges in managing class size, as well as limited resources and support from school administrators (Avenido, 2020).

In Davao City, a study conducted by Flores (2019) found that multigrade teachers faced challenges in managing the diverse needs of their students, particularly in relation to their different levels of ability and learning styles. The study also found that multigrade teachers faced high levels of workload and stress, which often led to burnout and job dissatisfaction.

These findings suggest that multigrade teaching can be a demanding and challenging profession in the Philippine context, particularly in rural areas where resources and support may be limited. There is a need for further research to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of multigrade teachers, to improve teacher well-being in the Philippines.

The study aims to explore the experiences of teachers about their ways of dealing with student misbehavior. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

➤ *This Study Hoped to Answer the Following Questions:*

- *What are the main challenges faced by multigrade teachers in rural areas particularly in relation to managing diverse student needs?*
- *What coping strategies do multigrade teachers in rural areas use to address the challenges they face in their work, particularly in relation to teaching multiple grade levels?*
- *What insights can be gained from the experiences of multigrade teachers in rural areas?*

➤ *The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in rural areas of Davao City, Philippines. The study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of multigrade teachers, particularly in relation to the challenges they face in their work. It will benefit the different stakeholders:*

- *Department of Education.*

The findings of this study will provide insights to the Department of Education in the Philippines on the challenges and opportunities that multigrade teachers face in rural areas of Davao City. This can inform policy and decision-making regarding the support and development of multigrade teachers, and the improvement of the quality of education in rural areas.

- *School Administrators.*

The study can provide school administrators with a better understanding of the experiences of multigrade teachers, which can inform the development of programs and interventions to support the professional development and well-being of their teachers. This can improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools.

- *Multigrade Teachers.*

The study can benefit multigrade teachers by shedding light on their experiences, challenges, and opportunities in their work. The findings of the study can help them gain a better understanding of their own experiences and provide them with insights and strategies to improve their work and well-being.

- *Students.*

The study can benefit students by improving the quality of teaching and learning in multigrade classrooms. By gaining a better understanding of the experiences and needs of multigrade teachers, interventions can be developed to enhance teaching practices, student engagement, and learning outcomes.

- *Future Researchers.*

The study can contribute to the body of knowledge on multigrade teaching in the Philippine context, particularly in

rural areas of Davao City. The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for future research and can inform the development of interventions and strategies to support and improve the work of multigrade teachers in the Philippines.

II. METHOD

The research design for this study is a qualitative phenomenological research design. This approach seeks to understand the essence of human experiences and the meaning that individuals attach to those experiences (Creswell, 2013). The study aims to explore the subjective experiences and perspectives of multigrade teachers in managing the diverse needs of their students in rural areas. The researcher will use in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face, either in the school or another mutually agreed location. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The study will use a phenomenological analysis approach to analyze the data (Moustakas, 1994). The analysis will involve a detailed examination of the interview transcripts to identify themes and patterns that emerge from the data. The aim is to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of multigrade teachers and the challenges they face in managing the diverse needs of their students. The qualitative phenomenological research design is suitable for this study as it allows the researcher to explore the subjective experiences and perspectives of multigrade teachers, providing rich and detailed data that reflects the complexity and richness of their experiences (Van Manen, 1990).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, the results of the data analysis are presented to provide answers to the research questions. Each theme is discussed comprehensively and literatures were used to further the discussion.

Before I begin my discussion, I would like to establish the symbols I used as I present the quotations based on the responses of the participants of the study. About the transcriptions of the conducted interviews, I used pseudonyms to refer to participants of the research.

➤ *Main Challenges Faced by Multigrade Teachers in Rural Areas Particularly in Relation to Managing Diverse Student Needs*

Multigrade teaching in rural areas poses a myriad of challenges for educators, requiring them to navigate the complexities of managing diverse student needs within limited resources. This section delves into the main challenges faced by multigrade teachers in rural settings. Through the narratives of participants, the researcher unravelled five overarching themes that encapsulate the multifaceted challenges experienced by these educators. From addressing varied academic levels and learning readiness to grappling with cultural and linguistic diversity, each theme sheds light on the nuanced struggles encountered by multigrade teachers. By comprehensively examining these challenges, readers can gain a deeper understanding of

the demands placed on educators in rural multigrade settings and pave the way for informed discussions on effective pedagogical strategies and support systems. Participants' responses were grouped into five themes: *Dealing with Time Constraints due to Instructional Demands, Having Limited Educational Resources, Addressing Varied Academic Levels and Learning Readiness, Facing Problems Arising from Cultural and Linguistic Diversity, Dealing with Behavior Issues*

- *Dealing with Time Constraints due to Instructional Demands.*

Time management becomes even more pressing when teachers are faced with the challenge of delivering instruction to students with diverse needs and across multiple grade levels. In this study, participants expressed the constant pressure associated with managing time efficiently to meet the instructional demands of a multigrade classroom.

- *Having Limited Educational Resources.*

Access to educational resources is a fundamental aspect of effective teaching and student learning. Multigrade teachers, often working in resource-constrained environments, face challenges in providing diverse and quality learning materials.

- *Addressing Varied Academic Levels and Learning Readiness.*

Multigrade classrooms inherently encompass students with diverse academic levels and learning readiness. Teachers in such settings face the challenge of tailoring instruction to meet the unique needs of each student.

- *Facing Problems Arising from Cultural and Linguistic Diversity.*

Multigrade classrooms often reflect cultural and linguistic diversity, presenting unique challenges and opportunities.

- *Dealing with Behavior Issues.*

Behavioral challenges are a common aspect of teaching, and multigrade classrooms are no exception.

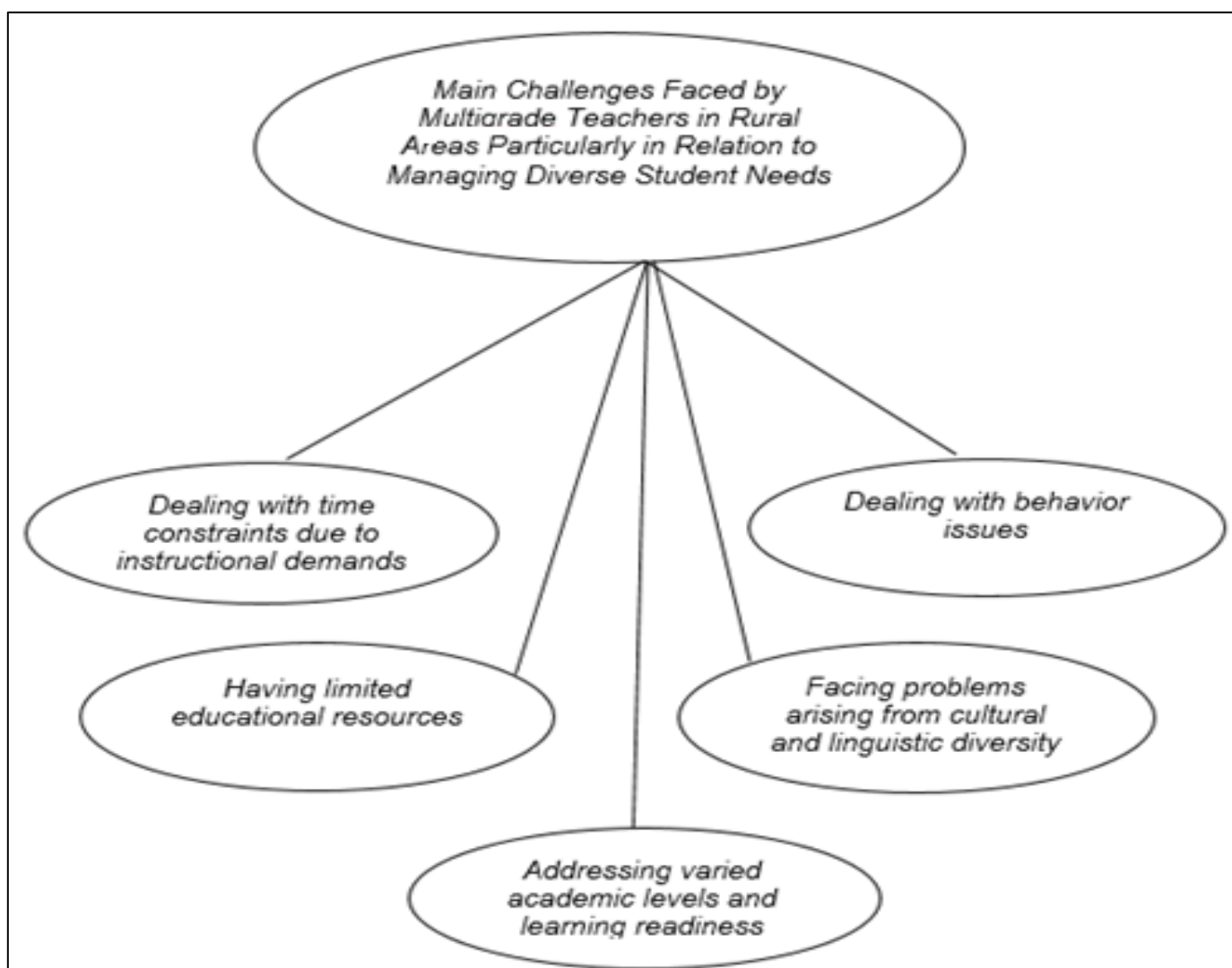


Fig 1 Emerging Themes on the Main Challenges Faced by Multigrade Teachers in Rural Areas Particularly in Relation to Managing Diverse Student Needs

➤ *Coping Strategies that Multigrade Teachers in Rural Areas Use to Address the Challenges They Face in their Work, Particularly in Relation to Teaching Multiple Grade Levels*

Within the educational landscape, the role of multigrade teachers in rural areas is marked by a distinct set of challenges. Addressing the complexities of instructing multiple grade levels concurrently demands innovative coping strategies from educators. This section discusses the coping mechanisms of multigrade teachers. The following themes emerged: practicing collaborative learning, sharing Resources, exercising flexibility, seeking professional development and adapting to change. By unraveling these themes, the researcher gained insights into the strategies that support multigrade teachers against challenges, fostering a resilient and adaptive educational environment for their students.

- *Practicing Collaborative Learning.*

Collaborative learning, defined as the process of students working together to achieve a common goal, is a theme that emerges from the experiences of multigrade teachers. This approach aligns with educational theories emphasizing social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), emphasizing the importance of social interactions in the learning process. The significance of collaborative learning is echoed in the works of scholars like Ahmad and Abdullah (2020), Avenido (2020), and Caro and Gabinete (2019).

- *Sharing Resources.*

Multigrade teachers often find themselves in resource-challenged environments, navigating the complexities of teaching various grade levels with limited materials.

- *Exercising Flexibility.*

Multigrade teaching demands a high degree of adaptability and flexibility from educators. This theme explores how teachers navigate the challenges of simultaneously addressing the diverse learning needs of students across different grade levels.

- *Seeking Professional Development.*

Multigrade teachers often express a keen interest in seeking professional development opportunities to enhance their teaching skills and adapt to the challenges of the multigrade setting. This theme delves into the participants' perspectives on the importance of continuous learning and their efforts to engage in professional development activities.

- *Adapting to Change.*

In the multigrade teaching context, educators often find themselves navigating through changes in curriculum, teaching methods, and educational policies.

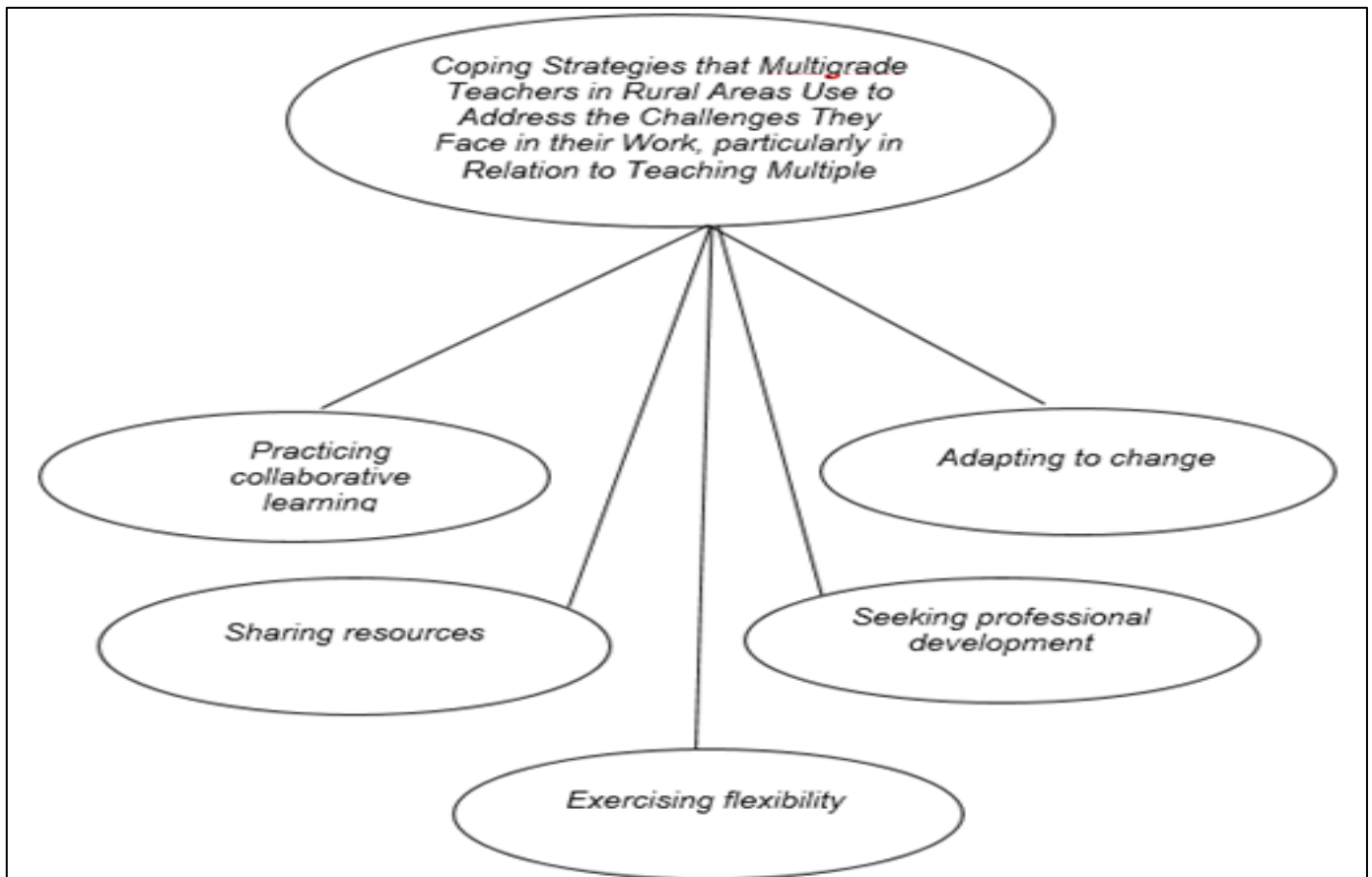


Fig 2 Emerging Themes on the Coping Strategies that Multigrade Teachers in Rural Areas Use to Address the Challenges They Face in their Work, particularly in Relation to Teaching Multiple

➤ *Insights Can Be Gained from The Experiences of Multigrade Teachers in Rural Areas*

In delving into the insights of multigrade teachers, themes were identified. Through their responses from the interview, the researcher uncovered invaluable insights that not only encapsulate the essence of their journey but also offer guidance for educators and policymakers alike. These themes include: embracing challenges with resilience, recognizing flexibility as a cornerstone, emphasizing wise management in resource-limited settings, and advocating for the due recognition of the diverse skills of multigrade teachers.

- *Embrace the Challenge.*

In rural multigrade teaching, educators emerge as unsung heroes, conquering daily hurdles such as navigating to remote stations, handling multiple grades in a single setting, and crafting numerous lessons daily. The challenges of location and infrastructure fade in significance with the presence of dedicated teachers, epitomizing the belief that teaching transcends physical constraints.

- *Flexibility is Key.*

Multigrade teachers in rural areas embody adaptability, seamlessly navigating changes in curriculum, teaching methods, and policies. This theme explores participants' perceptions of and adaptations to these changes, shedding light on the dynamic nature of multigrade classrooms.

- *Manage Wisely.*

Multigrade teachers in rural settings master the art of efficient time management and prioritization. Balancing the demands of handling multiple grades, limited resources, and the intricacies of rural classrooms, these educators exemplify strategic management.

- *Advocate for Recognition.*

Multigrade teachers in rural areas play a crucial role not only in classrooms but also in advocating for the recognition of their unique challenges and contributions.

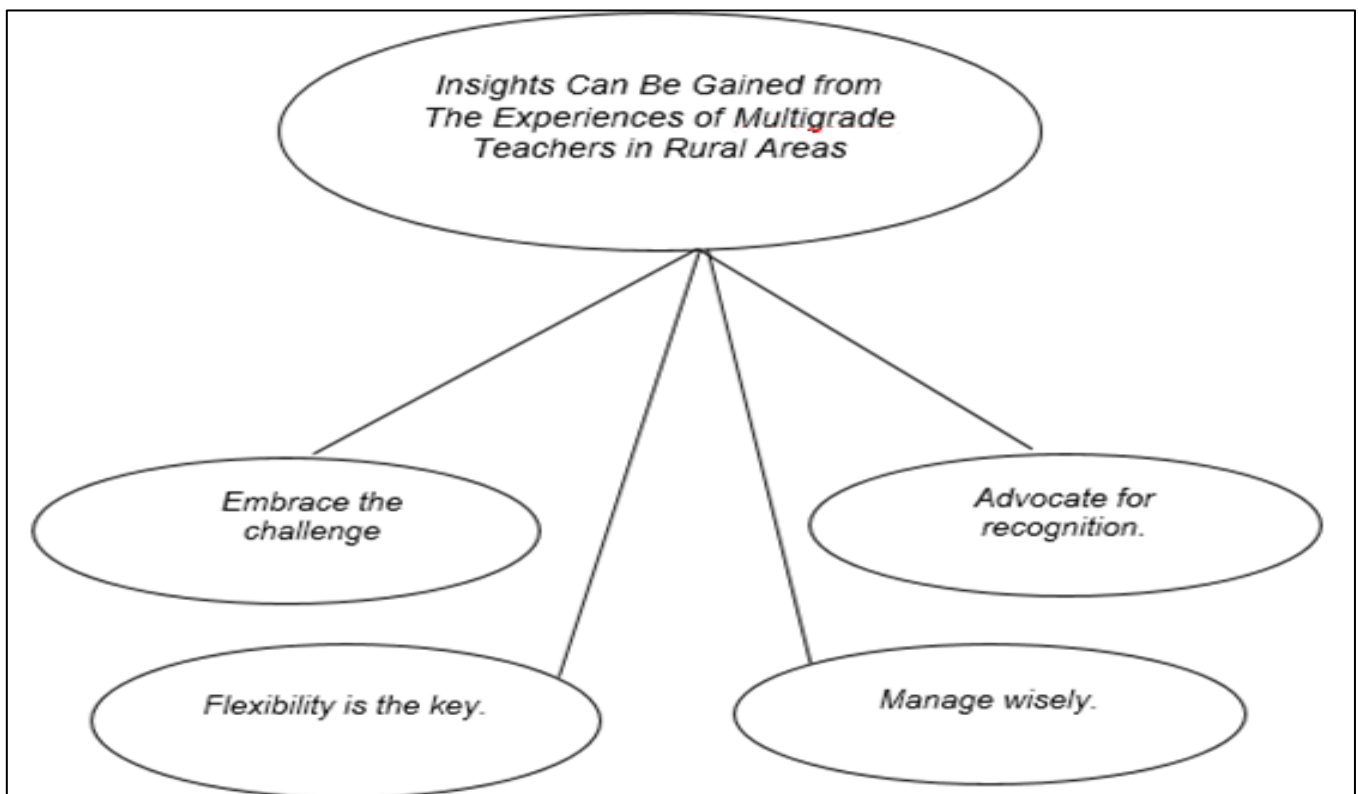


Fig 3 Emerging Themes on *Insights Can Be Gained from the Experiences of Multigrade Teachers in Rural Areas*

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