



Opportunities and Challenges of a Multigrade Teacher: Inputs for a Proposed Professional Development Action Plan

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Abstract

Multigrade teaching is a situation in which one teacher is responsible for managing multiple grade levels of the same subject at the same time. This is a scenario in primary schools in the Philippines, where the number of grade-level students exceeds the number of teachers. In some cases, multigrade teachers may be responsible for two or three grade levels, teaching one subject and sometimes multiples. Hence, this interview type of research determined the perspectives of multi-grade teachers concerning the opportunities, challenges, and professional development they have in multi-grade teaching. Employing qualitative approach on research, the results of the study reveal that the respondents have lots of development needs that must be addressed to sustain quality education in multigrade classes. They can enhance this development needs due to hindrances in reaching their goals of uplifting it. It is recommended that the top management must conduct a survey – assessment tool to assess multigrade teachers' development needs. This assessment will help them in planning more opportunities and upskilling for multigrade teachers. The multigrade teachers must have a collaboration to overcome their hindrances and promote professional community platform to sustain development goals. For the future researcher can use this study as basis for future improvement in multigrade education. They can conduct experimental research on the effectiveness or multigrade action plan on addressing multigrade teacher's development needs and assess its reliability in minimizing hindrances.

Keywords

Opportunities, Challenges, Multigrade Teachers, Professional Development Action Plan

INTRODUCTION

Multigrade teaching is the circumstance in which one teacher is liable for managing multiple grade levels of the same subject at the same time. This is a scenario in primary schools in the Philippines, where the number of grade-level students exceeds the number of teachers. In some cases, multigrade teachers may be responsible for two or three grade levels, teaching one subject and sometimes multiples. The Department of Education implemented and supervised multigrade education. This is one of the strategies of the department of education for providing quality education to all school-age children in remote and isolated place where the number of students does not justify the creation of single-grade classrooms (DepEd, 2009).

The guidelines from DepEd Order No. 81, s. 2009, keep the teachers teaching many grades. DepEd rewarded the multigrade teachers for becoming more competent, dedicated, and optimistic in their teaching roles. The department granted a unique hardship allowance as specified by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) a training program for multigrade teaching using the Multigrade Teach Learn Package (MG-TLP) and Multigrade Training Resource Package (MG-TRP) as part of an ongoing standards-based professional development program. Lastly, the department encourages schools to add more incentives to the accounts for the teachers who serve as multigrade teacher. These are one of the few benefits multigrade teachers have that not only enhance their confidence in teaching as multigrade teacher levels but also give them the opportunity to acquire professional development.

However, a slight increase in salary and small privileges are not enough to sustain the arising conflicts in multigrade teaching. The multigrade teachers in Tayabas City shows significant challenges. Preparation and discipline are the most common issues in multigrade setting. These include the following: daily lesson planning, inadequate teaching resources and oversight of classroom management, acquittance with distinct plan in teaching multigrade classroom the used of instructional strategies in authentic teaching-learning context, and the dearth of facilities in schools, an timetable of activity , large class sizes, inadequate functionality of teachers, insufficient pre-service and in-service teacher, preparation of program focus on particular multigrade skills , as well as concerns about the future (Mirando, 2022). These conflicts and challenges delay the teaching deliberation and sometimes the growth of professionals multigrade teachers.

Giving attention to the opportunity, challenges and acquired and employment achievement of multigrade teachers may pave the way in developing effective materials that will help them in their daily basis specifically in continuous professional development, contributing to major development in support of multigrade teacher at the elementary level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized qualitative methods which comprises collecting and analyzing non-numerical data, such as text, video or audio, with the goal of understanding concepts, options or experiences. It is a method for gaining complete insight into an issue or generating innovative ideas for future researcher (Bhandari, 2020).

In this study, this was utilized to identify the opportunities, and the status of multigrade teachers in their professional development, the researcher utilized a qualitative research method that incorporates a key informant interview which fosters a more authentic and unbiased exploration. This will be conducted to investigate and gain a deep understanding of the situation of the multigrade teachers within the Tayabas district which in turn will pave way in the development of an effective professional development action plan.

The study was conducted in all the public elementary schools in Tayabas District in Quezon Province. The researcher believed that these elementary schools with large numbers of enrollees have limited number of teachers. Deriving in the conclusion that there are multigraded teachers in these schools. The data and situation in this institution can sustain the requirements in the study determining the opportunities and challenges of a multigrade teacher and its implication on professional development.

The researcher used purposive sampling technique to gather the target respondents for this study which are the elementary school multigrade teachers in Tayabas District in the province of Quezon. The researcher utilized purposive sampling with the following requirement: (1) three or above years in teaching multi-grade classes, (2) handles different grade level limited to grade levels 1-6 only; and (3) have attended seminars and programs for multigrade teaching. This sampling technique allows the researcher to take data from the needed multi grade teachers in public elementary level in the chosen locale. A total of seven (7) public elementary schools are included in the district of Tayabas.

The needed data in this study follows the follow gathering process are as follows:

The data collection began by writing and sending a letter to the principal in all the public elementary school in Tayabas District, Quezon Province, requesting permission to conduct the study and describing the researchers' intention to use their multigrade teachers as the respondents. Following permission, the researcher sent a letter of intent to the respondents specifically all the multigrade teachers who work with students in Grade 1-6 only and have at least 3 years of experience in multigrade teaching.

Once the requisite permissions granted by school authorities, the researcher was to establish direct communication with the intended participants. This achieved by dispatching detailed letters of intent, outlining the study's objectives, and elucidating the crucial role that the participant will play in the research process. This communication ensured that the participating science teachers are well-informed about the study's purpose and their expected contributions.

To gather responses, the researcher opted for a face-to-face approach using key informant interviews, a qualitative method carefully selected to developed deeply into the opportunities, challenges and the status of professional development of the respondents. Prior to these interviews, explicit permission will be sought to record the sessions, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate documentation of the valuable insights provided by the respondents.

An ethical consideration of paramount importance throughout this entire process is the assurance of confidentiality. The participating respondents they are guaranteed that their responses will be kept strictly confidential and used only for research reasons. This commitment to upholding the privacy and anonymity of the respondents underscores the ethical and principled approach adopted in both data collection and analysis.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic strategy to identify, analyze, and report patterns of themes in a dataset. In the framework of the research on the experiences of multigrade teachers in Tayabas district, thematic analysis is chosen as the approach of data analysis. The significance of thematic analysis lies in its ability to uncover, interpret, and present the underlying patterns and meanings inherent in participants' responses.

Firstly, thematic analysis is an essential and vital method for this study because it allows the researcher to organize and make sense of the rich and diverse data collected from the multi-grade teachers. Given the complexity of the participants' experiences in handling multigrade classes, thematic analysis offers a structured yet flexible framework to identify recurrent ideas, issues, and perspectives that emerge from their narratives. Secondly, thematic analysis is well-suited for analyzing the opportunities, challenges and the status of professional development of these individuals. By systematically coding and categorizing responses related to difficulties encountered, the method enables the researcher to

distill common themes, providing a comprehensive understanding of the shared obstacles faced by multi-grade teachers in the given context. Additionally, when investigating the solutions and strategies employed by science teachers to overcome challenges in teaching laboratory classes in non-traditional settings, thematic analysis offers a methodical way to classify and interpret these adaptive measures. This process helps in identifying not only the variety of strategies employed but also the underlying principles or commonalities among them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Emerging Themes on the Identification of Development Needs as Multigrade Teacher

Themes	Responses
Needs for Research and trends in Education	Research on strategies and methods for effectively teaching students with diverse learning needs (2) Exploring trends in educational technology and how to integrate them (2) Keeping up with trends in global education and understanding how to incorporate global perspectives (1)
Professional Development for Differentiated Instruction and Curriculum Planning	Be informed of the diverse learning needs within a multi-grade classroom setting. (3) Plan a curriculum with personalized learning approaches to cater to individual student needs and preferences across various grades. (2)
Classroom Management in Multigrade Class	Implementing evidence-based strategies for managing behavior (2) Developing systems for organizing materials, resources, and physical space to accommodate the needs of multiple grade levels and subjects. (1) Learning how to allocate instructional time efficiently to address the curriculum requirements. (1) Establishing smooth transitions and consistent routines to help students navigate between different activities and grade-level expectations. (2)

Based from the analysis conducted by the researcher, it was identified that the first theme for the developmental needs is to staying engaged in research and informed about trends in education is paramount to meeting the diverse needs of students across grade levels. Six key informants highlighted the necessity for research on strategies and methods tailored to effectively teach students with diverse learning needs, emphasizing the importance of differentiation within the classroom.

The results further confirm the observations of Gutierrez and Kim (2017) discovered that when teachers conduct research to improve their own instructional techniques, four characteristics are nurtured: collaboration, sustainability, trust, and dedication.

The second identified development needs by the multigrade teachers are the Professional development tailored to differentiated instruction and curriculum planning is imperative for multi-grade teachers to effectively address kids' different needs in their classes. The identification of three key informants emphasizing the importance of being informed about the diverse learning needs within a multi-grade classroom underscores the necessity for strategies that accommodate varying levels of ability, background, and learning styles.

According to Ebaegu and Stephens (2020) lesson study provides promise advantages as vehicle for teacher professional development if the strategy is sensitive to cultural barriers to effective implementation. A lack of professional development training in viewed as the fundamental reason of the stagnated enthusiasm in thinking school leadership post (Alegado, 2018). Irembere (2019) concluded that Filipino teachers are solely considered as "implementers of curriculum" and strongly suggested that they be at the center of curriculum design and development procedures. These categories represent promising initiatives to arrange Teacher Professional Development for Filipino teachers.

And last identified development needs by the multigrade teachers are the development requirement of multigrade instructor in classroom management, it is evident that several key areas require attention. Two informants underscored the importance of implementing evidence-based strategies for managing behavior, highlighting the critical role of effective behavior management in creating a conducive learning environment. This necessitates training and support to equip teachers with the skills and techniques needed to address behavioral challenges across different grade levels while maintaining a positive and productive classroom atmosphere. Additionally, another informant emphasized the need for developing systems for organizing materials, resources, and physical space to accommodate the diverse needs of multiple grade levels and subjects. This involves careful planning and design of the classroom environment to optimize learning experiences and facilitate smooth transitions between activities and subjects.

Cadosales 2017 asserted the students rely heavily on teachers' ability to successfully delivered lessons. However, a far higher number of students fail to meet the DepEd expected mastery level of national passing requirement. In the 2018 national achievement test, a higher percentage of students failed even in basic courses such as science, math, and English. During the actual instructional monitoring, teachers in far-flung or remote and isolated locations (RIA) reported problems instructing multigrade course. There are only few trainings provided for them and most of the training for multi-grade is facilitated by the private service providers and the registration fee is expensive. Thus, multigrade teachers opted to wait if the division will initiate training and instructional supervision for them.

Table 2 Emerging Themes on the Determined Hindrances for Multi-Grade Teachers to Address Development Needs

Themes	Responses
Limited Resources	Inadequate access to resources such as teaching materials, technology, and professional development opportunities (2) Inadequate classroom resulting merging of Grade Levels in One Room (4)
Time Constraints	Demands of teaching multiple grade levels with lesson planning. (2) Given multiple administrative and ancillary tasks (3)
Lack of Training and Support	Insufficient training and support in implementing differentiated instruction (2) Lack of Training for Personalized learning approaches may leave teachers feeling ill-equipped to address the diverse needs (1) detracting from teachers' ability to focus on individual student needs (2)
Isolation or Remote Assignment	Limited opportunities for collaboration and professional learning communities (3)

Limited resources, as highlighted by six interviewed teachers, pose significant hindrances for multigrade teachers in addressing their development needs. Inadequate access to teaching materials, technology, and professional development opportunities can severely impede teachers' ability to implement effective strategies for differentiated instruction and curriculum planning.

According to Amua-Sekyi (2020) in a research conducted in Ghana, "lack of funding was perceived to impinge well beyond the classroom to the workplace and ultimately to the state of the economy" as reported by some respondents. "If we have teaching and learning resources such as slides, flow chat of life cycle on screen, students can make contributions even as the topic is being presented," her responses said. She discovered that another issue raised by her responders was a shortage of large classroom space.

Time constraints, as noted by five interviewed teachers, represent a significant hindrance for multigrade teachers in addressing their development needs. Balancing the demands of teaching multiple grade levels with lesson planning presents a formidable challenge, often leaving teachers with limited time to dedicate to their own growth and development.

To support this, a study, according to Stoloff and Goyette's (2022) discussion, stated that a 20-teacher study provided their professional expertise and personal experience throughout the pandemic provide a unique and in-depth insight. Needless to say, the complexities of the scenario demanded a significant shift in their typical technique for doing things. Along with Lacroix and Potvin (2009) and Brunon and Cau-Bareille (2020), the study demonstrates that during COVID-19, teachers abandoned their usual practices and engaged in a continuous, purposeful, voluntary, and well-planned process to reform and reinvent their teaching.

Lack of training and support. This was highlighted by two interviewed teachers who expressed concerns about insufficient training and support in implementing differentiated instruction. Additionally, another teacher mentioned that the absence of training for personalized learning approaches leaves educators feeling ill-equipped to meet the different needs of their students. Consequently, this lack of training and support detracts from teachers' ability to focus on individual student needs.

To support this study Sintones (2019), multigrade teachers' professional knowledge and abilities are critical to their ability to teach effectively. Managing instructional and behavioral competencies ensures the enchantment of the knowledge and skills to be imparted to students. Meaning, training and workshop will give more effective learning for teachers.

Isolation and remote assignments, which have led to limited opportunities for collaboration and the formation of professional learning groups. These challenges highlight the importance of fostering connections among educators and finding innovative ways to overcome geographical barriers (Cádenas, Gonzáles, Àvarez, 2020). Similarly, Richard and Farrell (2015) defined teacher professional development as long-term personal growth that helps instructors define and make meaning of their teaching practice and themselves as individuals. Furthermore, self-growth and self-direction are critical to teacher development. According to Hiemstra and Brockett (2021), these are characteristic of an individual that predispose one toward taking primary responsibility for personal learning and endeavors". In addition, educator growth is "an ongoing learning process in which teachers engage voluntarily to learn how best to adjust their teaching to learning needs of their students.

Table 3 Emerging Themes on Initiatives and Strategies to Address the Development Needs

Themes	Response
Technology Integration for Facilitating Learning	integrate technology into instruction to facilitate personalized learning experiences (2) Create online platforms or forums where multi-grade teachers can access resources and share best practices. (1)
Peer Mentoring Programs	one-on-one coaching sessions with instructional coaches or mentors (2) collaborate with their colleagues, share lesson plans, and discuss strategies (4) Involve parents and community members in the education process (2)
Attending Training on Differentiated Instruction	Attend focused on strategies for effectively differentiating instruction (2) help multi-grade teachers identify areas for growth and development (1) adapt curriculum materials that are suitable for teaching multiple grade levels simultaneously (1)
Effective Time Management	flexible scheduling and access to resources that accommodate the unique needs (2)

Integrating technology into instruction is crucial for multigrade teachers to facilitate personalized learning experiences, as highlighted by three interviewed teachers.

Teacher education programs, like virtually every other sector or profession, have struggled with the ever-changing societal reliance on domain specific technology, as well as the need for educational programs and practitioner to adopt such technologies (Elmer and Ottenbriet-Leftwich, 2017). The tensions between teachers, teacher educator, and preservice teacher have resulted in uneven adoption and comprehension of ICTs and their applications in diverse curriculum domain (Kozma, 2023).

Peer mentoring programs and one-on-one coaching sessions with instructional coaches or mentors are invaluable initiatives for addressing the development needs of multi-grade teachers, as emphasized by two key informants. Furthermore, collaboration with colleagues, sharing lesson plans, and discussing strategies emerge as crucial elements in addressing the development needs of multigrade teachers, as highlighted by four interviewed teachers.

According to the study, technical help frequently differs, but one common aspect is the movement of information and tools from one institution to another in order to address an identified need for change (Wesley & Buysse, 1996). Another is, it develops a strategic plan for long-term transformation, or provide an innovative approach to a growing complicated issue (Blase, 2009) (National Technical Assistance Center, 2000). In the study of Okamoto and Potane (2020), public school principal, public school district supervisors, and education program supervisors gave technical support and assistance to multigrade instructors, particularly with regard to the key substance of the lessons.

Attending training sessions focused on differentiated instruction is paramount for addressing the development needs of four multigrade teachers, providing them with essential strategies to effectively cater to the diverse learning needs of students across varying grade levels.

According to Mathot (2021), multigrade teaching necessitates additional learning resources because students are frequently required to work independently. Fyfe (2020), on the other hand, claims that in multi-grade classes, students work together to use available resources and complete assignments. According to Joubert (2020), educational resources and the physical environment should be structured and organized to improve student learning. According to these beliefs, multigrade classrooms should include a variety of well-arranged resources for students to share. Furthermore, Sag (2019) proposes that students in multigrade classrooms help to prepare resources and equipment such as charts, wordbooks, reading mats, library corners, and counting stands.

Table 4 The Multigrade Development Needs Action Plan



Republic of the Philippines
Department of Education

REGION IV-A CALABARZON
CITY SCHOOLS DIVISION OFFICE OF THE CITY OF TAYABAS

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR MULTIGRADE TEACHERS
ACTION PLAN SY 2024-2025

OBJECTIVES	PROGRAMS/PROJECTS/ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED OUTPUTS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BUDGET	BUDGET SOURCE	TARGET	TIMELINE	PERSONS RESPONSIBLE
To capacitate the multigrade teachers in crafting Multigrade Lesson plan using New Curriculum and Budget of work	Conduct of Training/Seminar Workshop	100 % attendance of Multigrade Teachers and Multigrade School Head Accomplished Lesson Plan per Multigrade Class	No. of Participation and Accomplished Lesson Plan	15,000	MG Budget	Quality Assured Multigrade Lesson Plan	July 2024	Division Multigrade Supervisor, MG Teachers, MG school head, Top Management, PDO
To equip the multigrade teachers on Facilitating Multigrade Classes using Content and Pedagogy and	Conduct of Training/Seminar Workshop	100 % attendance of Multigrade Teachers and Multigrade School Head	No. of Participation	15,000	MG Budget	Demonstration Teaching	July 2024	Division Multigrade Supervisor, MG Teachers, MG school head, Top Management, PDO



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Effective Classroom Management								
To create lesson plans and learners' materials for <u>Multigrade Classes</u> Year - Round	Conduct of Training/Seminar Workshop	100 % attendance of <u>Multigrade Teachers and Multigrade School Head</u>	No. of Participation	30,000	MG Budget	Collection of Lesson Plans and Lesson Exemplars for <u>Multigrade</u>	July 2024	Division <u>Multigrade Supervisor, MG Teachers, MG school head, Top Management, PDO</u>
To secure continuous improvement of <u>Multigrade Class Programs and Projects</u>	Conduct of Monthly Meeting for benchmarking and MG updates	100 % attendance of <u>Multigrade Teachers and Multigrade School Head</u>	No. of Participation	None	None	Attendance and Minutes of Meeting	Year Round	Division <u>Multigrade Supervisor, MG Teachers, MG school head,</u>
To equip <u>multigrade teachers</u> in Technology Integration for Facilitating Learning	Conduct of Training/Seminar Workshop	100 % attendance of <u>Multigrade Teachers and Multigrade School Head</u>	No. of Participation	15, 000	MG Budget	Demonstration Teaching	Year Round	Division <u>Multigrade Supervisor, MG Teachers, MG school head</u>

The action plan above shows the crafted multigrade action plan for addressing multigrade teachers' development needs. The first column is composed of the target goals of objectives of the action plan which are based on the informants answer during the interview. The second column is for the programs or projects needed to achieve the given objectives. The remaining part of the plan is for the performance indicators, budget allocation, timeline and people involved for the given program.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings, as stated above, lead to the following conclusion:

1. There are lots of development needs for multigrade teachers that must be addressed to sustain quality education in multigrade classes.
2. Some of the respondents experienced hindrances in reaching their goals of uplifting their development needs.
3. Most of the multigrade teachers are willing to undergo training to upskill their knowledge and skills in handling multigrade classes. They also appreciated the mentoring and coaching as part of their continuous improvement as teacher.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICT

The author state that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that cloud have influenced the work presented in this study.

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