

Leadership Complexities of School Heads in Multigrade Education

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Date received: April 9, 2025

Date revised: May 3, 2025

Date accepted: June 1, 2025

Originality: 95%

Grammarly Score: 99%

Similarity: 5%

Recommended citation:

Bojos, W., Almerez, Q. L., Trinidad, A., Arnado, J. A., & Fuentes, A. (2025). Leadership complexities of school heads in multigrade education. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 3(6), 574-588.

<https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2025.240>

Abstract. This study explored the experiences of multigrade school heads, focusing on the challenges they face in balancing teaching and administrative duties amid staffing shortages and limited resources. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, eight multigrade school leaders who served as school leaders and classroom teachers were interviewed. The data were manually transcribed, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis, with confidentiality maintained throughout the process. The results highlighted the challenges faced, strategies employed, and the support multigrade school heads need in carrying out their complex roles. The challenges were summarized under the central theme: Thriving Through Innovation, Resilience, and Effective Management. The strategies were captured in the theme: Enhancing Multigrade Education Through Adaptability and Support. Lastly, the support needs were reflected in the theme: Strengthening Multigrade Education Through Policy, Support, and Collaboration. The study results revealed that multigrade school heads face significant challenges, which were encapsulated in the theme "Thriving Through Innovation, Resilience, and Effective Management," highlighting their need to constantly adapt and lead despite limited resources and staffing shortages. In response to these challenges, they employed various strategies, captured in the theme "Enhancing Multigrade Education Through Adaptability and Support," demonstrating their flexibility and reliance on internal and external support systems. Furthermore, their expressed needs for sustained assistance were reflected in the theme "Strengthening Multigrade Education Through Policy, Support, and Collaboration," emphasizing the importance of clear policies, adequate resources, and strong partnerships to ensure multigrade education's long-term effectiveness and sustainability.

Keywords: Multigrade education; School leadership.

1.0 Introduction

In underprivileged communities, multigrade education is not just a teaching model—it is a daily reality for dedicated school heads who must balance leadership responsibilities with hands-on classroom instruction. Imagine a school head teaching children of different ages and grade levels in one small classroom, making the most of limited resources and adapting lessons to meet varied learning needs while also managing the school's operations. From a global perspective, Shareefa (2021) noted that for schools to sustain their path toward delivering high-quality instruction, school heads must provide ongoing, impactful professional development to broaden teachers' range of instructional strategies. Equally important is establishing a strong system for monitoring and supervision to support this growth. Another point by Thaba-Nkadimene (2020) mentioned that

in South Africa, to improve teaching and learning in multigrade schools, it's essential to address the specific needs of learners and teachers in rural schools.

Nationally, Naparan and Alinsug (2021) highlighted that multigrade teachers in the Philippines must possess strong classroom management skills, promote collaborative learning, and implement differentiated instruction that connects lessons to real-life situations. They must also integrate technology through digital tools and demonstrate flexibility in their teaching approach. In addition, Abocejo et al. (2023) highlighted that teachers and school heads in multigrade education experience significant stress and challenges due to the demands of managing multiple classes, extensive reporting, and numerous school activities. Similarly, Basilio (2024) identified shortcomings in teacher professional development programs, citing quality, relevance, and funding issues. At the same time, efforts are being made to introduce professional development programs at various levels. Teachers and school leaders acknowledge the barriers that hinder their participation in training, which may contribute to gaps in student learning.

Although there is plenty of research on teaching strategies and student performance in multigrade classrooms, we know much less about the day-to-day experiences of school heads who also teach. These leaders often balance the demands of running a school while managing a classroom, especially in areas with limited resources. Their challenges are poorly understood, and there's a clear need for more research on how they handle these dual responsibilities and ensure their schools continue to function effectively.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study was on a phenomenological qualitative research design-based approach. Phenomenology is a good fit for this study because it seeks to understand school heads' complex and real-world experiences deeply. By capturing their detailed, context-rich insights, this approach ensures that any program developed will be relevant, practical, and genuinely responsive to the unique demands of multigrade leadership. As Zahavi (2020) noted, phenomenology does not focus on delivering precise, detailed descriptions of objects, nor does it attempt to understand how we experience things and explore phenomena in all their varying forms of existence.

2.2 Research Participants

The study participants were the eight school heads who had experienced managing multigrade schools and classes in Sulop District, in Davao del Sur division, regardless of age and gender. The number of participants is adequate for this study to generate themes since this is a phenomenology study. Ahmed (2025) noted that the recommended sample sizes for various qualitative research designs focusing on phenomenology studies are 5-25 participants. This study employed the purposive sampling method. Participants were intentionally chosen based on criteria aligned with the research goals, explicitly focusing on school heads in multigrade settings. Inclusion criteria include the following: (a) participants hold positions as teacher-in-charge, head teacher, or principal, (b) at least two consecutive years of experience managing multigrade schools at the same time handling multigrade classes, (c) participants should be a Department of Education personnel, and have a duly signed appointment from the division superintendent. Exclusion criteria include the following: (a) individuals who do not have direct experience managing a multigrade school, (b) those who have not continuously managed a multigrade school while teaching multigrade classes for at least two years, (c) school heads without an official appointment from the Department of Education who manage multigrade schools.

2.3 Research Instrument

The researcher developed the interview guide questions without pilot testing. Two educational management professors and a Department of Education multigrade focal person in the division of Davao del Sur validated their content validity. Participants underwent an in-depth interview.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data for this study were collected through interviews lasting forty to forty-five minutes using a set of guide questions prepared by the researcher. The researcher secured a signed permit to conduct the study from the institution, division office, and district principal supervisor or designated official overseeing the schools managed by the participants. Before data collection began, the researcher visited the school to present the signed permits from the division and district offices and confirm the interview date with the participants. At the start of the

interview, the researcher ensured that participants were fully informed and had signed a consent form. This form detailed the study's purpose, the estimated duration, and the intended use of the collected data. It also emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary and assured participants of the confidentiality of their responses.

Additionally, the researcher informed participants about using an audio recorder and reiterated that all information shared would remain strictly confidential throughout the process. After the interviews, the recorded audio responses were manually transcribed by the researcher, with participant confidentiality carefully maintained throughout. Once the transcription was complete, a member-checking process was conducted to ensure the credibility of the findings, allowing participants to review the transcribed data and emerging themes. This step enabled them to confirm the accuracy of their responses, correct any misunderstandings, and provide additional insights if necessary.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were essential to ensure that participants' rights were protected. Taquette and Taquette et al. (2022) emphasized that ethics was a vital part of research that influenced every step of the process. Also, Mirza et al. (2023) stated that ethics in research involved the researcher's responsibility to protect participants' rights, ensure transparency to the academic community, and consider the broader societal impact of their work. Thus, several ethical considerations in qualitative research were enumerated, including respect, relationships with participants, conflict of interest, informed consent, incentives, confidentiality and anonymity, reporting back to the participants, and trustworthiness of research.

Respect in ethical considerations requires researchers to treat all individuals involved in or impacted by their research with fairness, sensitivity, and dignity. This included recognizing and valuing differences such as age, gender, ethnicity, cultural identity, and other significant characteristics. Ensuring freedom from prejudice and upholding individuals' rights were essential in creating a respectful research environment. Respect for participants and conflict of interest requires researchers to maintain the integrity and flexibility of their research by fostering a professional yet approachable relationship with participants during data collection. Researchers needed to emphasize their unbiased stance, as any perceived bias could distort the data and compromise the accuracy of the findings.

Informed consent required researchers to obtain voluntary informed consent from each participant before data collection. This involved sending a consent letter that outlined the research's purpose, objectives, and ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and anonymity, ensuring that participants fully understood their involvement. By providing informed consent, researchers upheld ethical standards, protected participants' rights, and fostered trust in the research process. Incentives were considered a significant ethical concern, as offering material incentives for participation was deemed unethical. Instead, researchers motivated participants by highlighting the potential community benefits of the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity had to be communicated to participants and included in the researcher-participant agreement. All data was handled and stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act, ensuring only the researcher had access to the information. Reporting back to the participants was an essential step after data collection. Researchers ensured that participants received a copy of their responses, questionnaires, or transcripts. To avoid misinterpretation and promote transparency, participants were also provided with a summary of how their data was analyzed, allowing them to verify the accuracy and integrity of the findings. Trustworthiness of research was ensured by addressing credibility and consistency through prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, reflexivity, and maintaining an audit trail. These practices helped strengthen the research's trustworthiness and allowed for thorough verification of the results. All data were securely stored in a password-protected digital folder, accessible only to the researcher and trusted team members, and stored for as long as needed based on the organization's policies.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Experiences of the School Heads in Managing Multigrade Education

Multigrade school heads experienced the constant challenge of balancing administrative duties with their educator role. They had trouble with paperwork, attending sudden meetings, and accommodating unexpected visitors, often leaving their classes unattended. This led to disruptions, with students becoming restless and

assigned activities left unchecked due to time constraints. They also experienced pressure to ensure students met required competencies, especially before exams. However, urgent district tasks sometimes pulled them away from their classes, making it challenging to cover all necessary lessons. As a result, some students struggled to keep up, leaving school heads torn between their administrative responsibilities and their commitment to quality education. These experiences reflect their daily struggles in managing leadership and teaching roles effectively.

As shown in Table 1, the experiences of multigrade school heads in multigrade education faced an overwhelming workload and significant time constraints as they manage teaching and administrative responsibilities. The burden of dual responsibilities requires them to balance school leadership with classroom teaching, often leading to exhaustion and stress. Despite these overwhelming demands, they demonstrate resilience and commitment, consistently persevering to ensure their students receive quality education. In response to the challenges, they employ innovative and adaptive teaching methods, creatively addressing the diverse needs of students across multiple grade levels. Their ability to stay dedicated and innovate, even under challenging circumstances, underscores their determination and passion for education.

Table 1. Core Ideas, Emerging Theme, and Major Theme on the Experiences of the School Heads in Managing Multigrade Education

Core Ideas	Emergent Themes	Major Themes
Since I am both a multigrade school head and a classroom teacher, I multitask a lot. While learners are working on their assignments or activities, I take the opportunity to complete administrative tasks.	Overwhelming Workload and Time Constraints	Thriving in Multigrade Teaching Through Innovation, Resilience, and Effective Management
School-head related tasks such as checking of lesson plans, provision of technical assistance to co-teachers and managing school operations and resources are most challenging since I also had my own class.		
The complex task of being a school head, because I am not only focusing on my task as school head because I also have a child to teach.		
Doubled efforts to meet both school management and instructional demands.	Burden of Dual Responsibilities	
Balanced administrative tasks with quality teaching through strategic planning and time management.		
Ensured efficient administration without compromising teaching and learning quality.		
Sacrificed personal time to fill in the gaps, making school work often feel like home work.	Resilience and Commitment Amidst Overwhelming Demands	
Felt tired and overwhelmed when teaching one class, while the other class is still progressing with their activities.		
Exhausted when Grade 3 finishes their activity, but I am still working on Grade 4's tasks.		
Mastered differentiated instruction to effectively manage time while addressing diverse learning needs.	Innovative and Adaptive Teaching Method	
Implemented explicit teaching to ensure learners grasp essential skills for mastery.		
Applied a variety of teaching methods and strategies to accommodate individual learning styles and needs.		

Figure 1 presents the challenges multigrade school heads face in multigrade education, summarized under the major theme: *Thriving in Multigrade Teaching Through Innovation, Resilience, and Effective Time Management*. This central theme emerged from four key sub-themes: overwhelming workload and time constraints, burden of dual responsibilities, resilience and commitment amidst overwhelming demands, and innovative and adaptive teaching methods.

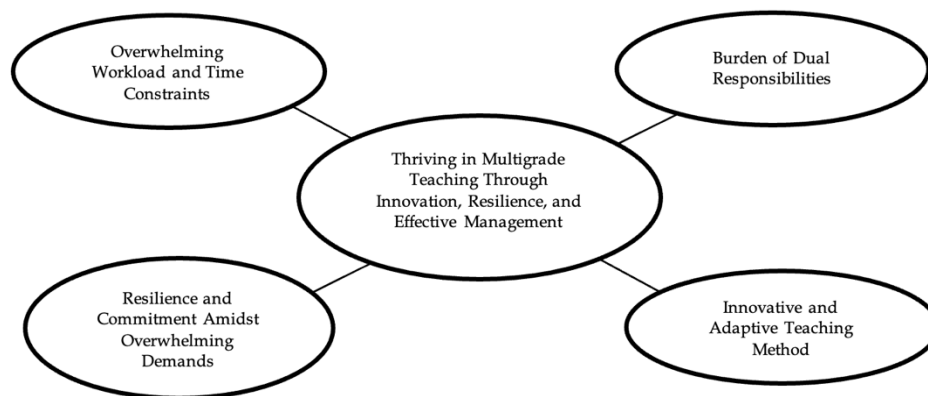


Figure 1. Challenges of Multigrade School Heads in Multigrade Education

Multigrade education is a complex yet vital approach that requires multigrade school heads to innovate, be resilient, and manage strategically to ensure effective learning for students of different grade levels and school improvement. Multigrade school heads faced the complex challenge of balancing instructional responsibilities and administrative duties while addressing their learners' diverse needs. As Bagay (2024) averred, a multigrade school leader managing administrative and instructional responsibilities understands the challenges of multigrade teaching. Also, Chabalala and Naidoo (2021) mentioned that it is crucial to understand that school leaders are not just administrators; they are instructional leaders who guide the teaching and learning processes across multiple grade levels within a single classroom. This underscores the need for improved policies, enhanced support systems, and increased collaboration to strengthen multigrade education.

Overwhelming Workload and Time Constraints

The findings revealed that multigrade school heads experienced significant challenges balancing administrative and instructional responsibilities. School heads in multigrade settings experienced a variety of administrative duties, including financial management, reporting, and coordination with higher authorities. These tasks require meticulous attention, often competing with their teaching responsibilities. This experience of a multigrade school head is challenging and overwhelming, as they struggle to balance teaching multiple classes in a single classroom while handling administrative tasks. The workload overload leads to confusion in prioritization, resulting in tasks being completed but with compromised quality due to a lack of focus.

"Since I am both a multigrade school head and a classroom teacher, I multitask. While learners are working on their assignments or activities, I take the opportunity to complete administrative tasks, such as the MOOE liquidation. Delays in liquidation can happen, but since there is a timeline and submission deadline (usually within 15 days upon receipt of the check), I must ensure it is liquidated within that period." MGSL6L17-25Pg1-2

This reflects how school heads must be strategic in using their time, often working on administrative duties while students are engaged in independent activities as an instructional task of school heads. The results highlighted that managing an overwhelming workload goes beyond simply completing tasks efficiently; it also involves maintaining sustainability in the challenging role of a multigrade school head. As Cariaso (2019) averred, school heads in multigrade settings should ensure that teachers have manageable workloads and appropriate teaching preparations that align with the diverse needs of their students. Dulana et al. (2023) mentioned that multigrade school heads focus on or prioritize finding solutions to challenges such as classroom organization and management issues. Thereafter, overwhelming workloads and time constraints demand specific strategies to deal with the complexities of the role of multigrade school heads in multigrade education. School heads create a well-structured and supportive environment by prioritizing tasks, fostering collaboration, and utilizing resources effectively.

Burden of Dual responsibilities

Multigrade school heads experienced the overwhelming role in multigrade education, as they experienced dual

responsibilities in a multigrade setting, which is both physically and mentally demanding. The dual responsibilities they experienced in multigrade education arise from managing multiple grade levels while handling administrative tasks. This increases workload and stress, requiring effective strategies to maintain quality instruction and classroom management. School heads balanced administrative duties, such as managing school operations, providing technical assistance to co-teachers, and handling financial reports, while ensuring quality teaching. Moreover, the experiences of school heads in multigrade settings revealed the overwhelming weight of their dual responsibilities. They are not just administrators ensuring that reports are submitted and policies are followed—they are also teachers, deeply committed to shaping young minds. The constant pressure of balancing these roles often leaves them physically and mentally exhausted.

“The biggest challenge of handling administrative and instructional tasks is meeting administrative deadlines, especially for reports, since I handle everything myself. I am both the teacher and the administrator, which makes it overwhelming. Another challenge is the implementation of DepEd programs and projects, particularly in informing teachers and stakeholders. Some teachers and parents tend to be negative about changes, and another challenge is maintaining partnerships with external stakeholders.” MGSL6L76-82Pg4

The main challenge of managing administrative and teaching duties is meeting deadlines, especially for reports, as the school head handles everything alone. Balancing these tasks is overwhelming, and implementing DepEd programs is difficult, especially when faced with resistance from teachers and parents. These results reflected the daily struggle of many school heads who dedicate themselves to leadership and instruction, often at the cost of their well-being. Schweiger et al. (2020) reminded that managing these schools well is not just about skills but a leader's willingness to keep learning and stay resilient when things don't go as planned. Taole et al. (2024) note that school heads in rural multigrade schools face the formidable challenge of balancing teaching responsibilities with school management. Therefore, the dual responsibilities of multigrade school heads in multigrade education are overwhelming, often leading to stress and workload challenges for teachers. Juggling multiple grade levels while handling administrative tasks can affect teaching quality and well-being. Without proper support and strategies, this burden may impact classroom efficiency, making it essential to find ways to balance these responsibilities effectively.

Resilience and Commitment Amidst Overwhelming Demands.

Multigrade school heads in multigrade education experienced the challenge of work-life balance, wherein their demanding task often led to stress and tiring, since some of their functions or unfinished tasks in school brought to their home and sometimes made it during weekdays. Despite these overwhelming demands of their dual roles as multigrade school heads in multigrade education, their resilience and commitment shone through their unwavering dedication. Multigrade school heads are responsible, as instructional tasks demand patience, dedication, and flexibility in a multigrade classroom. Also, they face the challenge of balancing different grade levels, but their commitment and resilience enable them to create meaningful learning experiences. Every day, they juggle lesson preparation, teaching multiple grade levels, and handling administrative tasks, ensuring their students receive quality education while managing school responsibilities.

“I sometimes felt so stressed and drained, especially when administrative-related reports are due, making me feel less effective and physically tired. I sacrificed my time to fill in the needed gaps; that is why schoolwork is also homework.” MGSL1L43-46Pg2

The experience reflects the stress and fatigue experienced by multigrade school heads due to administrative duties, often sacrificing personal time to complete tasks, which results in work spilling over into their personal life. The resilience of multigrade school heads is not about enduring hardship—it is about their unwavering commitment to making multigrade education work, no matter the cost. As Karaçoban and Karakuş (2022) mentioned, teachers who are newly assigned to schools with multigrade classrooms face greater challenges than those placed in single-grade classrooms. Also, Jabiñar and Mustacisa (2024) found that teachers expressed an overall positive perspective on multigrade classrooms despite their challenges. Afsar and Umrani (2020) mentioned that positive leadership boosts employees' motivation to learn and fosters innovation in their work. Multigrade school heads relied on resilience and commitment to manage diverse classrooms and overcome challenges, while administrative tasks were always on their side. Their dedication and adaptability ensured meaningful learning experiences, allowing students and educators to thrive despite limitations.

Innovative and Adaptive Teaching Method

Multigrade school heads experienced limited teaching resources and manpower in multigrade education. The responses from the participants highlighted the significance of innovative and adaptive teaching methods in multigrade education. Multigrade school heads emphasized the necessity of selecting appropriate activities and assessment strategies tailored to students' grade levels and diverse learning needs, despite sometimes leaving their class unattended and unsettled activities because of unexpected administrative duties like entertaining surprise visitors, parents' concerns, and abrupt meetings.

"For me, the most effective approach is the Practical Work Approach (PWA), which is based on John Dewey's 'learning by doing' philosophy. Students learn better through hands-on activities rather than paper-and-pencil tests or chalkboard lessons. They enjoy the learning process when they engage in activities, especially when they involve reporting. After an activity, I always include a collaborative task because, in my experience, this is the most effective strategy." MGSL6L68-73Pg4

The statement emphasized how multigrade school heads use the Practical Work Approach (PWA) to enhance learning. By prioritizing hands-on activities and collaboration, they make learning more engaging and compelling, aligning with the philosophy of "learning by doing." Multigrade school heads effectively met the diverse needs of their students despite their demanding role in multigrade education by combining differentiated instruction, explicit teaching, practical work, collaborative learning, and structured time management. As Puzio et al. (2020) mentioned, educators recognize that a single approach does not meet the needs of all learners, so they incorporate differentiation, explicit instruction, and collaboration to enhance student learning. Tiernan et al. (2020) mentioned that students of different ages and abilities learn together; differentiation is crucial for addressing the varied needs of each pupil. Moreover, Elston et al. (2022) mentioned that explicit teaching involves systematically instructing strategies, skills, and rules in a clear, structured manner to enhance learners' understanding and abilities. Thereafter, innovative and adaptive teaching methods are essential in multigrade education to meet the diverse needs of students. Multigrade school heads effectively manage multiple grade levels by incorporating differentiated instruction and collaborative learning while performing administrative responsibilities. These strategies encouraged student engagement and peer interaction, fostering an inclusive and dynamic learning environment for the pupils.

3.2 Strategies to Address the Challenges and Optimize the Benefits of Multigrade Education

Being a multigrade school head with a teaching load is a demanding role that requires exceptional time management, adaptability, and dedication—balancing school administration while actively teaching means juggling multiple responsibilities, overseeing school operations, preparing lessons, and guiding students. To make this dual role more manageable, school heads often find effective strategies such as prioritizing tasks, implementing strong classroom management, engaging in continuous professional development, fostering a collaborative and inclusive learning environment, and managing workloads wisely. With the right approach, they can lead their schools effectively while ensuring quality education for their students.

As shown in Table 2, the strategies of multigrade school heads were implemented to manage the challenges of handling dual responsibilities in multigrade settings. These strategies included effective workload and classroom management by establishing structured routines and flexible rules, helping students understand when to work independently, in pairs, or groups. Authority was maintained through respect, and consistent discipline fostered a positive learning environment. Task prioritization, scheduling, and delegation managed workloads effectively, ensuring balanced responsibilities and improved productivity.

Petrescu et al. (2022) mentioned that integrating collaborative decision-making support into educational platforms is crucial for addressing the unique challenges and improving the learning experience for diverse learners. Also, Longaquit (2024) mentioned that effective resource allocation is essential for meeting the diverse needs of students while aligning with the school's goals. Lohmann et al. (2021) averred that effective classroom management involves the strategies and practices teachers implement to set and uphold behavioral and academic expectations, creating a supportive and engaging learning atmosphere.

Table 2. Core Ideas, Emerging Theme, and Major Theme on the Strategies to Address the Challenges and Optimize the Benefits of Multigrade Education

Core Ideas	Emergent Theme	Major Theme
Establishing structured and clear daily routines, flexible classroom rules help students stay engaged and understand when to work independently, in pairs, or in groups.	Effective Workload and Classroom Management	Enhancing Multigrade Education Through Adaptability and Support
Maintaining authority through respect and consistently enforcing discipline fosters a positive, well-managed learning environment.		
Efficient workload management through task prioritization, scheduling, and delegation ensures balanced responsibilities and improved productivity.		
Ongoing professional development through LAC sessions, division-based training, and joint multigrade instruction programs equips teachers with updated skills and knowledge on current teaching trends.	Continuous Professional Development	
Maintaining journals enables to track challenges, document problem-solving approaches, and share flexible, collaborative solutions for continuous improvement in multigrade instruction.		
Peer and cooperative learning, along with hands-on activities, promote collaboration, independence, and deeper understanding among students, enhancing overall performance.	Collaborative and Inclusive Learning	
Strong community support through School Governing Councils (SGCs), PTAs, local organizations, and local government units (BLGU & LGU) facilitates resource mobilization, program support, and addressing teacher shortages.		
Parental involvement as "little teachers" further strengthens the learning environment by assisting students with reading and other academic activities.		

Figure 2 presents the strategies of multigrade school heads in multigrade education, centered on the major theme: *Enhancing Multigrade Education Through Adaptability and Support*. This theme emerged from three key sub-themes: effective workload and classroom management, continuous professional development, and collaborative and inclusive learning.

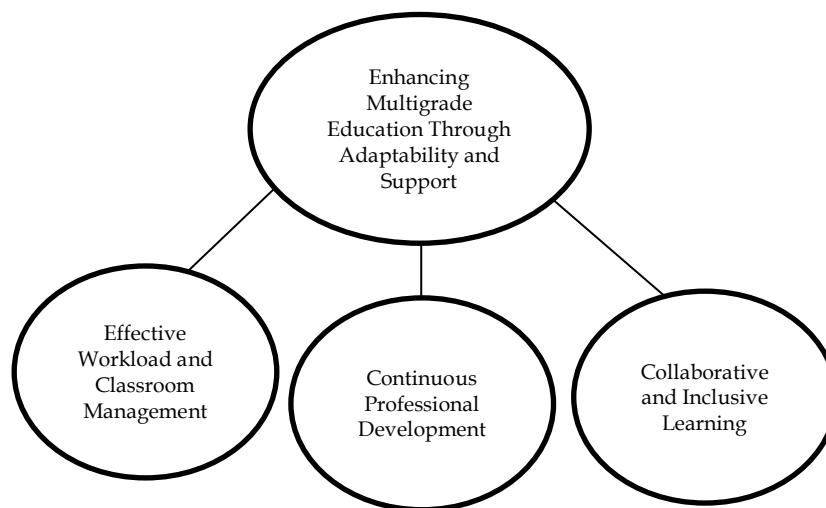


Figure 2. Strategies of Multigrade School Heads in Multigrade Education

Multigrade education thrives on flexibility, innovation, and strong support systems to address the challenges of teaching multiple grade levels in a single classroom. Multigrade school heads must skillfully manage diverse learning needs, curriculum integration, and administrative tasks while maintaining an engaging and structured environment.

The key to success lies in adaptive instructional methods, effective classroom management, and collaboration with school leaders, communities, and policymakers. Strengthening these areas ensures that multigrade education remains effective, inclusive, and capable of providing quality learning experiences for all students.

Effective Workload and Classroom Management

Multigrade school heads implemented strategies to address the challenges of managing administrative and instructional duties. They established clear daily routines and flexible classroom rules, which helped students understand when to work independently, in pairs, or groups, ensuring engagement. They maintained authority through respect and consistently enforced discipline, creating a positive and well-managed learning environment. To handle the heavy workload, school heads focused on task prioritization, effective scheduling, and delegation, which helped balance responsibilities and improve productivity. These strategies enabled them to navigate the challenges of multigrade education while maintaining a productive learning environment.

Establishing clear expectations helps students understand appropriate behavior and responsibilities, creating an orderly classroom. Effective classroom management, including setting rules and enforcing discipline, is crucial in maintaining engagement and a positive learning environment in a multigrade setting. By setting clear expectations, encouraging peer collaboration, and using creative strategies, multigrade school heads ensure students remain focused and motivated to learn together. Strict discipline is essential to prevent disruptions, as without it, students struggle to grasp competencies, leading to ineffective learning. At the same time, establishing authority in a non-corporal manner is crucial, as teachers who are too lenient may lose control of the class, hindering overall classroom management. Strict discipline is necessary for effective learning, as noise and disruptions prevent students from grasping key concepts. Multigrade school heads must respectfully establish authority, avoid physical punishment, and use strategies like rewards to maintain control and motivate students.

You must establish authority, not in a corporal way, not by physically punishing them, but by having something that makes them respect and listen to you. They won't follow you if you are too lenient in your classroom. You need to have a strategy to manage them properly. Also, using rewards as motivation. MGSL5L68-73-30Pg4

The statements emphasize that strict discipline is necessary for effective learning, as noise and disruptions prevent students from grasping key concepts. Multigrade school heads must respectfully establish authority, avoid physical punishment, and use strategies like rewards to maintain control and motivate students. Effective workload and classroom management in a multigrade setting involves setting clear rules, enforcing discipline, establishing authority, managing time efficiently, and maintaining motivation. Multigrade school heads must balance administrative and instructional duties, ensuring that teaching strategies align with classroom management to create an engaging, organized, and productive learning environment for all grade levels. As Lathifah et al. (2020) mentioned, successful classroom management involves fostering positive relationships, maintaining behavioral expectations, and implementing effective instructional strategies. Daga (2021) suggested that school leaders should provide tailored resources like lesson plans, instructional materials, and assessment tools to help teachers address the diverse needs of students across grade levels, ensuring effective instruction and improved learning outcomes.

Continuous Professional Development

The results highlighted the critical role of continuous professional development in improving the skills and effectiveness of multigrade school heads. Training programs, workshops, and collaborative learning sessions provided school heads with the tools to tackle the unique challenges of managing multiple grade levels within one school.

"Sending training on multigrade instruction. Participate in the joint LAC session with other multigrade school heads." MGSL2L63-64Pg4

Multigrade school heads engage in training and joint learning action cell sessions with fellow multigrade school leaders, collaborating and exchanging effective strategies to enhance instruction in multigrade settings. Ongoing professional development was crucial for multigrade school heads to improve their leadership skills and address diverse student needs. Through continuous learning, collaboration with peers, and exploring innovative

strategies, they strengthened classroom management and ensured effective instructional delivery. Minaz et al. (2024) averred that multigrade teachers need professional training and practical experience to effectively prepare and absorb the strategies they learn. Jabiñar and Mustacisa (2024) highlighted that multigrade teachers strongly needed more professional development opportunities. Thereafter, ongoing professional development enabled multigrade school heads to enhance their leadership strategies, adapt to diverse student needs, and support effective instruction. Through continuous learning and collaboration, they improved classroom management and ensured the delivery of quality education in multigrade settings.

Collaborative and Inclusive Learning

Multigrade school heads employed strategic approaches to address the complexities of managing school administration and instruction. They established structured routines and flexible classroom management strategies to ensure smooth transitions between lessons and maintain student engagement across different grade levels. They created an organized and positive learning environment by reinforcing authority through respect and consistent discipline. School heads implemented effective scheduling, task prioritization, and delegation to manage overwhelming workloads and balance responsibilities efficiently. They also promoted continuous professional development by facilitating training programs and collaborative sessions to enhance instructional techniques. Furthermore, strong community partnerships and parental involvement were crucial in mobilizing resources, supporting instructional activities, addressing teacher shortages, and ensuring a more effective multigrade education system.

“Inter-Multigrade School Collaboration - Leadership exchange programs allow principals from different schools to observe successful multigrade classrooms and apply best practices.” MGSL3L95-97Pg5

Multigrade school heads benefit from leadership exchange programs, allowing them to observe successful practices in other schools and apply effective strategies in their classrooms. Collaborative and inclusive learning benefits student engagement and academic success in multigrade classrooms. As Ansari and Khan (2020) expressed, collaborative learning and active engagement were shown to have a positive impact on academic performance. Also, Herrera-Pavo (2021) expounds that instructional design can incorporate various tools to enhance interaction and foster collaborative learning.

Moreover, Reyes and Meneses (2024) mentioned that an inclusive collaborative learning approach in multigrade education requires institutional support for multigrade school heads, enabling them to balance their dual responsibilities in administration and instruction by providing the necessary knowledge, resources, and tools. Also, Ní Bhroin and King (2020) emphasized the crucial role of multigrade school heads, whose leadership ensures that all collaborative team members clearly understand their roles, responsibilities, and accountability, fostering interdependence and effective teamwork in multigrade education. Therefore, the vital role of multigrade school heads in ensuring effective administration and instructional leadership was recognized. Balancing workload and classroom management, prioritizing continuous professional development, and fostering collaborative and inclusive learning were key to optimizing school operations and improving multigrade education. Through adaptability and commitment, multigrade school heads drove meaningful change and enhanced learning outcomes.

3.3 Support Needs to Address Challenges in Multigrade Education

Balancing managing a school while teaching in a multigrade classroom is no easy feat. Multigrade school heads wear many hats—mentor, administrator, teacher, and even problem-solver—while navigating limited resources and support. Despite their unwavering commitment, the lack of assistance often overwhelms their workload. To lighten this burden, practical solutions like administrative support, better workload management, and stronger community involvement are essential. When school heads are given the help they need, they can focus on what matters most: guiding their students, creating a positive learning environment, and administrative responsibilities.

As shown in Table 3, the multigrade school heads need support in their complex role in multigrade education, and strengthening policy implementation and monitoring was crucial for multigrade school heads to ensure the effective delivery of multigrade education. Training and mentorship programs, differentiated instruction, and innovative classroom strategies played a key role in improving student outcomes and school performance under the leadership of multigrade school heads. Supporting multigrade school heads is crucial for strengthening

education through policy, support, and collaboration. Enhancing community and government partnerships ensures that multigrade schools receive the resources and assistance needed to address unique challenges. Implementing training and mentorship programs empowers multigrade school heads with the skills, confidence, and knowledge to lead effectively, while enhancing policy implementation and monitoring ensures that the right strategies are consistently applied. With continued support, multigrade school heads are empowered to create a more resilient and effective education system, improving outcomes for educators and students in multigrade settings.

Table 3. *Core Ideas, Emerging Theme, and Major Theme on the Support Needs to Address Challenges in Multigrade Education*

Core Ideas	Emergent Themes	Major Themes
Active Stakeholder Participation like Parents, barangay officials, and local business leaders engage in School Governing Councils (SGCs) and community-driven fundraising efforts to support school development.	Strengthening Community and Government Collaboration	Strengthening Multigrade Education Through Policy, Support, and Collaboration
Community & Parental Involvement in Learning like Parents volunteer as "little teachers," assisting children with reading and learning, while barangay officials support student participation in programs like BSP and GSP registration.		
Collaboration with Local Government Unit or Provincial level for Teacher Support like School heads work with the LGU to address teacher shortages by requesting PSB or LSB teachers and tapping into local resources.		
Multigrade school heads are supported through continuous leadership training and opportunities to collaborate with other schools.	Training and Mentorship Program	
School heads work closely with the community to gather resources and improve school facilities, ensuring that the needs of multigrade education are met despite limited resources.		
Even without a master teacher, school heads step up to mentor fellow educators through Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, creating a strong support system to enhance teaching and learning.		
Multigrade school heads are supported through clear and transparent policies, which are regularly evaluated to ensure proper implementation in schools.	Enhancing Policy Implementation and Monitoring	
School heads receive specialized multigrade training to equip them with the necessary skills to manage and support multigrade education effectively.		
School heads are provided with monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools to assess the effectiveness of multigrade education and address challenges.		
School heads play a role in requesting additional teachers and ensuring that financial benefits, such as multigrade allowances, are fairly distributed.		

Additionally, the findings emphasized the importance of community and government collaboration in providing essential resources, infrastructure, and support to sustain multigrade programs. Furthermore, addressing teacher motivation and retention through continuous professional development, career growth opportunities, and incentives was vital for multigrade school heads in maintaining a dedicated and skilled teaching workforce.

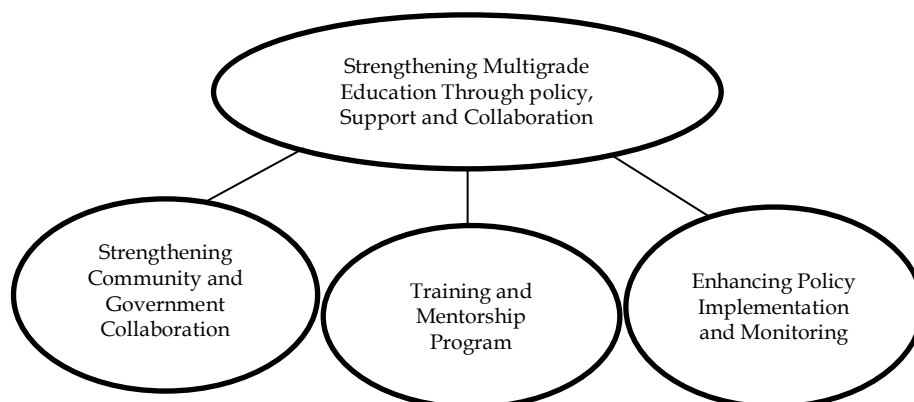


Figure 3. Support to Multigrade School Heads in Multigrade Education

Figure 3 presents the support needed by multigrade school heads in multigrade education, centered on the major theme: *Strengthening Multigrade Education Through policy, Support and Collaboration*. This theme emerged from three key sub-themes: strengthening community and government collaboration, , training and mentorship program and enhancing policy implementation and monitoring.

Strengthening Multigrade Education through Policy, Support, and Collaboration

Multigrade education is essential for providing quality learning, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Multigrade school heads, who balance both teaching and administrative duties, play a key role in making this approach successful. To enhance their effectiveness, they need well-designed policies, adequate support, and strong collaboration with educators, policymakers, and communities. By tackling the unique challenges of managing mixed-grade classrooms while overseeing school operations, they can create inclusive and effective learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of every student.

Strengthening community and government collaboration. The results showed that community and government collaboration was essential in supporting multigrade education, particularly in addressing teacher shortages, enhancing learning conditions, and ensuring overall school improvement.

Multigrade school heads were significantly supported in this process, as they were assisted in requesting additional teachers through the Provincial School Board (PSB) or Local School Board (LSB) to help manage the workload in multigrade classrooms. Parental and community involvement played a key role in supporting multigrade school heads in addressing challenges. Many parents actively assisted multigrade school heads by providing remediation to students who struggled with their lessons, helping to alleviate some of the difficulties faced by the school heads. Local organizations such as PTAs, School Governing Councils (SGCs), and LGUs have been instrumental in supporting multigrade school heads by mobilizing resources and providing financial and logistical assistance. The Bayanihan spirit, a Filipino tradition of communal cooperation, has been evident in school-based projects. Communities actively participated in fundraising events, school repairs, and infrastructure development, helping to create a better learning environment for students.

"Some parents voluntarily take on the role of "little teachers" by reading with the children or assisting them. They extend their help despite their own work and responsibilities. I can't say that 80% of parents are involved, but at least some of them truly are. They are present and engaged in their own way." - MGSL7L239-244Pg11

"The LGU (Local Government Unit) and PTA (Parents-Teachers Association), along with other collaborating groups, help us address issues and concerns regarding the difficulties of teaching in a multigrade setting. This is why we ask the LGU to request PSB teachers, to tap into their resources, and connect with them to address teacher shortages. This also helps reassure parents and encourage them to enroll their children, as the setup now feels more like one-on-one learning." - MGSL7L254-259Pg12

The results highlighted that the support and collaboration between schools, communities, and government agencies were crucial in helping multigrade school heads overcome challenges and ensure the success of multigrade education. As, Fatima et al., (2024) mentioned that if lack of official government support and policies for multigrade pedagogy creates a significant barrier to its effective implementation. And Dontogan et al. (2024) mentioned that engaging the community is essential for the success and sustainability of multigrade education.

Thereafter, Cleveland et al. (2023) specified that without strong commitment and financial support from national or local authorities, school principals, teachers, and governing boards must navigate community education improvements on their own, often lacking proper guidance, resources, and sustainable solutions. Therefore, strong collaboration between the community and government helped improve support for multigrade school heads in addressing challenges. By working together, they were able to enhance teacher training, upgrade facilities, and develop programs that met students' needs, ultimately creating a more effective learning environment.

Trainings and mentorship programs. The results showed that improving multigrade teaching and learning

conditions required the support of multigrade school heads, targeted training, and proper resource allocation. One key aspect identified was the provision of quality professional development programs for multigrade school heads. Continuous professional development helped ensure that multigrade school heads were equipped with the strategies needed to address the complexities of multigrade education.

Multigrade school heads stress the importance of specialized training for both teachers and leaders to ensure effective management and delivery of education in these challenging settings stipulated in Department Order No. 96, s. 1997 outlines the guidelines for organizing multigrade classes, particularly in remote areas. Inter-multigrade school collaboration through leadership exchange programs allows multigrade school heads to observe and learn from successful practices in other schools. This exchange enables them to apply effective strategies in their own classrooms, improving management and teaching practices in multigrade settings. The newest DepEd Order No. 17, s. 2023, which outlines guidelines for providing a special hardship allowance, is specifically limited to pure multigrade schools. This highlights the recognition of the unique challenges faced by school heads and teachers in multigrade settings, although it applies only to schools with a purely multigrade structure.

" Department Order No. 96, s. 1997: "Policies and Guidelines in the Organization and Operation of Multigrade (MG) Classes"- This order establishes the framework for organizing and operating multigrade classes, particularly in remote barangays. It emphasizes the need for specialized training for teachers and school leaders to effectively manage multigrade settings." - MGS2L145-149Pg7-8

Enhancing multigrade education required a holistic approach focused on supporting multigrade school heads through specialized leadership development, targeted training, and collaboration with schools, government initiatives, and external support. These efforts were essential in helping them address the challenges they faced in dual responsibilities. As, Brecio (2023) highlighted that in the Philippines multigrade education, parents played an active role as home educators, offering essential support and collaboration that significantly impacted the learning process. Karlberg-Granlund (2019) stated that the close-knit nature of these communities means the school and village are deeply interconnected, offering both benefits and challenges.

Enhancing multigrade education required providing multigrade school heads with the necessary resources, training, and adaptable teaching methods for both instruction and administration. With the right support, they were able to create a more supportive environment, effectively engage students, and improve overall school management, leading to better outcomes for all students.

Enhancing policy implementation and monitoring. The results showed that enhancing policy implementation and monitoring was crucial in supporting multigrade school heads to address challenges not only in instruction but also in administration. Current policies were either not fully implemented, inconsistently applied, or lacked transparency, making it difficult for school heads to manage effectively.

One of the main concerns raised by participants was the special hardship allowance (SHA) under DepEd Order No. 17, s. 2023, which only applied in pure multigrade schools, leaving out those handling mixed multigrade classes. Another key issue was the utilization of financial support for multigrade schools, as outlined in Department Order No. 52, s. 2012. Multigrade school heads reported that welfare benefits, such as the special hardship allowance, were not properly implemented. While Department Orders No. 96, s. 1997, and No. 63, s. 2010 provided guidelines for organizing multigrade classes and strengthening the Multigrade Education Program, multigrade school heads argued that more targeted interventions were necessary.

"We are always being monitored, but the policy for the welfare of multigrade teachers – such as the special hardship allowance – is not being monitored in our case. We do not receive any welfare benefits related to this. The policy should be transparent to everyone, and there should be a regular evaluation or assessment every year to check on the status of multigrade schools." - MGS2L275-280Pg13

The policies for multigrade education existed, issues such as inequitable financial support, lack of additional workforce, and gaps in training programs hindered multigrade school heads from effectively managing and implementing the programs. Tayoni and Aboejo (2023) mentioned that multigrade teachers are key to implementing the Multigrade education Program policy, ensuring student engagement and facilitating impactful learning experiences. The results highlight that policy implementation and monitoring require significant

improvements.

As, Jung et al. (2020) suggested that involving teachers and students in decision-making and giving them more autonomy increases their dedication to the school. Also, Afsar and Umrani (2020) mentioned that positive leadership boosts employees' motivation to learn and fosters innovation in their work.

Another view of, Seelig and McCabe (2021) emphasized the importance of supportive relationships with colleagues and administrators in teachers' decisions to stay, focusing on their commitment to students and leadership opportunities. Also Daga (2021) noted that financial incentives, professional development, and teaching support motivate multigrade teachers and reduce stress. And, Piper (2021) stressed the need for lasting state policies for multigrade schools, ensuring that each administration is accountable for advancing initiatives.

To sum up, strengthening policy implementation and monitoring in multigrade settings supported multigrade school heads by providing clear guidelines, regular evaluations, and necessary resources, leading to improved management and effectiveness. Additionally, supporting multigrade school heads helped boost their motivation, retention, and overall leadership effectiveness in managing multigrade education.

4.0 Conclusion

The study highlighted the significant challenges faced by multigrade school heads, such as managing heavy workloads, balancing administrative and teaching duties, and coping with limited resources and staff. To address these, school heads have implemented strategies like effective classroom management, continuous professional development, and strengthening partnerships with stakeholders. However, they pointed out that existing support systems are insufficient, stressing the need for more targeted policies, specialized training, and a deeper collaboration between schools, communities, and the government.

The findings underscore the need for policies specifically tailored to the unique demands of multigrade schools. These policies must be not only adaptable to evolving needs but also actively monitored to ensure they are working in practice. Furthermore, providing school leaders with the tools to manage their dual responsibilities—through capacity-building programs and leadership coaching—can significantly enhance their effectiveness. Collaboration emerged as a vital component, but beyond merely fostering partnerships, it's clear that creating sustainable, resource-sharing networks can greatly reduce pressure on individual school heads.

Equally important is addressing the well-being of school leaders. A focus on mental health, stress management, and work-life balance will enable them to thrive in their roles. This requires specific strategies, such as reducing workloads and establishing peer support systems, to help school heads navigate their demanding positions without compromising their health.

Finally, the study calls for continuous monitoring and evaluation of leadership strategies to ensure that they remain effective. Future research should investigate new teaching methods, explore the long-term impact of multigrade education on student learning, and assess its contribution to educational equity, especially in under-resourced communities.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Windel M. Bojos – Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing, Data Collection- original draft.
Queenie Lyn G. Almeraz – Formal analysis, Supervision, Project administration
Amelie E. Trinidad – Supervision -review and editing.
Jeric Anthony S. Arnado – Supervision -review and editing.
Augie E. Fuentes - Supervision -review and editing.

6.0 Funding

This research was conducted without any financial support from public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agencies.

7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no financial or personal affiliations that could have influenced the research presented in this manuscript.

8.0 Acknowledgment

Heartfelt gratitude is extended to Dr. Queenie Lyn G. Almeraz for her invaluable expertise, guidance, and belief in this work, which provided both inspiration and direction in completing this study.

Sincere appreciation goes to the esteemed thesis committee members: Dr. Augie E. Fuentes, who served as the chairperson, along with Dr. Amelie E. Trinidad and Dr. Jeric Anthony S. Arnado. Their insightful feedback, constructive criticism, and shared knowledge have significantly contributed to the refinement of this study.

A special note of thanks is given to the Multigrade School Leaders in the Sulop District for their willingness to participate in the interview process. Their generous sharing of experiences and insights added depth and richness to this study.

Endless gratitude is reserved for beloved parents, as well as siblings. Special thanks also go to in-laws, nieces, nephews, and cousins for their love, patience, and unwavering support. Their sacrifices, understanding, and steadfast belief have been a source of strength and inspiration every step of the way.

Above all, profound gratitude is given to Almighty God for His boundless grace, wisdom, and guidance. His divine blessings have provided strength and perseverance, making this achievement possible. This study stands as a testament to the collective support and generosity of everyone who has been part of this journey. With deep appreciation, sincere thanks are extended to all.

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