# Teachers' Resilience: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE COPING MECHANISM OF TEACHERS HANDLING MULTI-GRADE CLASSES

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**Abstract**

Access to education is considered a right for every citizen, and it is highly prioritized. This provides more opportunities for students who were unable to learn before. Multi-grade teaching is one important policy option for providing access to education for learners in remote areas (Taole, 2014). However, teaching within a multi-grade curriculum presents several challenges for elementary teachers. Therefore, teachers need to show resilience by utilizing various coping mechanisms to effectively convey learning to multi-grade learners.

This study aimed to explore the coping mechanisms employed by teachers in handling multi-grade classes. The researcher used a qualitative method with a phenomenological design and conducted in-depth interviews as the main strategy. The gathered data were categorized to produce major themes and formulate meanings. The analysis of the data in this study was patterned on Colaizzi's phenomenological descriptive method.

The study found that teachers have a hard time adapting to multi-grade teaching due to various reasons. Nonetheless, the teacher-participants have tried their best to adapt to multi-grade teaching through the following actions: following the most essential learning competencies specified in the teaching and learning guide, following the teaching principle of easy to hard or complex topics, utilizing varied teaching approaches such as differentiated teaching, direct observation, peer-teaching, and flexible teaching-learning, preparing instructional materials before the day of the class, considering learners diverse learning styles, using localized materials, the internet, and libraries, and managing and maximizing time effectively, are ways to adapt to or cope with the multi-grade teaching and learning process.

*Keywords*: Multi-grade Curriculum; Coping Mechanism; Adaptation; Multi-grade Teaching; Elementary Teachers; Multi-grade Learners

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, there are modifications that go along with teaching (Colebra & Mendano, 2022). It was agreed upon by Leroux and Théorêt (2014), as they stated that over the past few decades, the teaching profession has undergone changes that include more demanding work environments, complex tasks, a lack of resources, fewer opportunities for professional growth and support, challenging student relationships, and low parent involvement, especially in disadvantaged schools.

But despite teachers' difficult working settings, which cause some to burn out or even quit, some teachers see stress as an opportunity to grow professionally, a trait that could be referred to as resilience. Colebra and Mendano (2022) emphasized that teachers who were able to adapt to those modifications and challenges are the ones who can impart learning to the students more effectively.

In addition to the above-mentioned challenges faced by educators, teaching within a multi-grade curriculum presents another difficult situation for certain teachers. Joyce (2014) highlighted the fact that multi-grade education is understood to be a practical option for expanding access to basic education for disadvantaged children. As stated by Buaraphan et al. (2018), many countries in the Asia-Pacific region have millions of people living in scattered, thinly populated highlands, mountainous regions, and on small islands, which makes it difficult to provide a high-quality primary education. Therefore, multi-grade teaching curriculum provide a significant policy choice for granting learners in rural places access to education (Taole, 2014). With this goal of equality of education, multi-grade teaching is predominant and is increasing (Shareefa, 2021).

However, to this day, education materials, policies, and curricula are still developed for single-grade teaching rather than multi-grade teaching. It implies that in order to guarantee that instruction occurs, teachers must navigate it. They must show resilience by adjusting to and coping in the environment they are in (Tlaka, 2021). Thus, in order to have some influence on learning, teachers in these circumstances must use their teacher agency to decide on their lesson plans, instructional context, class activities, and teaching and learning resources, as emphasized by Ramrathan and Mzimela (2016).

Correspondingly, according to Taole (2020), diversity is also a factor to consider in teaching contexts at multi-grade classes. In a multi-grade classroom, learners have extremely distinct learning demands because the students in this classroom range in age and background.Thus, teachers need to know how to differentiate student learning activities to cater for this range of needs (Bannister-Tyrrell & Pringle, 2021). In that manner, multi-grade teaching can be seen as challenging because of the requirement to differentiate class material and activities to cater for children of different ages and stages (Quail & Smyth, 2014).

Moreover, according to Çakir and Firat (2022), the disadvantages of multi grade classrooms are: class preparations are very time-consuming and not all teachers are equipped with the necessary skills and experience to teach in multi grade classrooms. Furthermore, Phajane (2014) highlighted that while most educators have been trained for single-grade teaching, they lack the knowledge and abilities necessary to properly manage multi-grade classes. With that, it can be settled that teachers are faced with multiple challenges for teaching in multi-grade classrooms (Ramrathan & Ngubane, 2013). Hence, as highlighted by Taole (2014), achieving excellence in teaching and learning in rural contexts, with the application of multi-grade classes, remains a challenge for teachers and other sectors of the educational change endeavors.

Nevertheless, Naparan and Alinsug (2021) highlighted that despite those limitations and challenges experienced by both teachers and pupils in multi-grade school, students strived hard and tried their best to be meaningful and productive, and teachers employ several techniques and strategies to enhance the learners' abilities and skills.

According to Naparan and Castaneda (2021), there are coping strategies or mechanisms employed by teachers in handling multi-grade classes such as strengthening one's faith through prayer, using the internet's

power and the wealth of information, keeping to a schedule when performing duties and responsibilities, and renewing one's mind through the process of self-conditioning. Additionally, offering teachers' resource support and trainings will make it much easier for them to handle teaching multi-grade classrooms.

In the Philippines, there are 8,379 multi-grade schools out of the 38,911 public schools (CNU: A Multigrade Advocate, 2020). This number can be reasoned out with the data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2022), which states that the rural population, or those who lived in barangays classified as rural in 2020, comprised 50.10 million persons, or 46.0 percent of the total population in the country.

Moreover, in the municipality of Motiong, Samar, 20 out of 30 barangays have a population of 89–420 as of 2020 (PhilAtlas, n.d.) and are therefore considered rural areas. Hence, with widened access to education, multi-grade schools are located in those 20 rural barangays in Motiong, Samar. However, although the goal of the implementation of multi-grade teaching is to provide inclusive education in rural and remote areas of the Philippines, lack of training and insufficient resources and findings continue to be teachers' problems in rural elementary schools (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021).

In the local setting, the Motiong District, limited training is given to multi-grade teachers. During the school year 2022-2023, only one multi-grade seminar was conducted for multi-grade teachers in the Division of Samar, which was entitled, Capability-building for Multi-grade Teachers in the Upland and Coastal Schools of SDO Samar in the Implementation of Gender and Development Program, which was stipulated in Division Memorandum Number 478, series of 2022. Also, in the year 2021, only one orientation conference was conducted with reference to Division Memorandum Number 091, series of 2021 entitled, Re Division Orientation-Conference on The Utilization of Learning Action Cell (LAC) Resource Materials for Multi-grade Teachers and Distribution of Multi-grade Learning Materials. With that, it can be perceived that there is still a need for further seminars and trainings intended for multi-grade teachers in rural schools. Moreover, aside from the lack of training for multi-grade teachers, Naparan and Alinsug (2021) emphasized that teachers also complain of a lack of sufficient time for handling and managing multi-grade classes and recording the outputs of the learners for the multiple grade levels handled.

Thus, with all the data presented above, the researcher was encouraged to conduct this study. This study primarily aimed to explore the coping mechanisms employed by teachers in handling multi-grade classes. This study was conducted in multi-grade schools from one district in Samar Division, the Motiong district.

## 1.1. Research Questions

This study aims to explore the coping mechanisms employed by teachers handling multi-grade classes. In examining the multi-grade teachers' experiences, the subsequent research questions were utilized:

1. What are the teacher-participants' experiences and challenges encountered in teaching multi-grade classes?
2. How do teacher-participants become resilient to the challenges they have encountered in teaching multi-grade classes?

## 1.2. Conceptual Framework

The study used the input-process-output design as conceptual framework. In the conduct of the study, the inputs were: 1) the profile of the teacher-participants, 2) challenges and experiences of the multi-grade teacher-participants, and 3) coping mechanisms employed by the multi-grade teacher-participants.

**Input**
- The profile of the teacher-participants;
- Challenges and experiences of the multi-grade teacher-participants; and
- Coping mechanisms employed by the multi-grade teacher-participants.

**Process**
- In-depth interview
- Analysis using Colaizzi method

**Output**
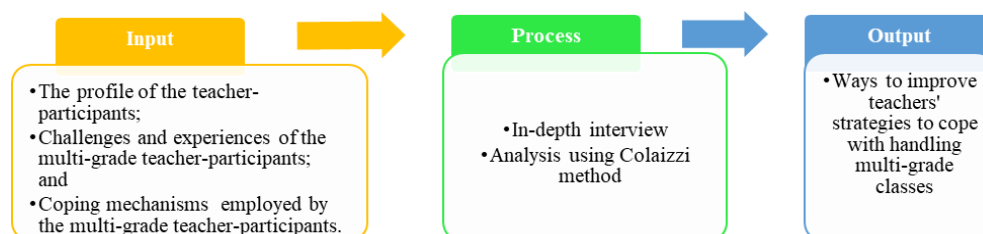- Ways to improve teachers' strategies to cope with handling multi-grade classes

Fig. 1. Research Paradigm

## 1.3. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Scaffolding Theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978), Montessori Educational Theory by Maria Montessori (1909), Differentiated Instruction (DI) by Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999), and Adaptation Model by Sister Callista Roy (1970). These theories focused on the idea of handling multi-grade classes, the coping techniques of teachers, and their adaptation skills in conducting multi-grade teaching.

Vygotsky (1978) established the scaffolding theory, which centers on a student's capacity to acquire knowledge with the assistance of a more knowledgeable person. Thus, it was highlighted that learning is a social process rather than an individual one. He even described the Zone of Proximal Development as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Wilson & Devereux, 2014).

This theory is in connection with multi-grade classes wherein learning through collaborative approach is known to be effective, specifically, with diverse learners. When students from other fields collaborate, they can learn from each other's perspectives and each person contributes fresh ideas (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021).

Another theory relevant to this study is the Montessori educational theory by Montessori (1909). According to Msimanga (2019), this theory is learner-centered and therefore learners remain at the center of education. Additionally, the Montessori-developed materials are based on the developmental requirements of the students, and they are improved until they satisfy the needs of the students specifically.

Moreover, at Montessori schools' different activities take place at the same time and the uniqueness of each child in the classroom is acknowledged. Multi-age students are housed in the classrooms, where various educational activities take place concurrently. Thus, this allows for cooperative learning which is known to be effective approach in multi-grade teaching. Therefore, it implies that there is a need to acknowledge heterogeneity in multi-grade classroom to welcome collaboration and success (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021).

Moreover, another theory that serves as a guide in crafting this research paper is the Differentiated Instruction (DI) theory by Carol Ann Tomlinson. Differentiated Instruction (DI) is best understood as a teacher's response to the various learning demands of pupils, according to Tomlinson (1999). DI serves as an example of how teachers apply tactics to meet the needs, interests, and learning preferences of their students. Also, this theory was associated from the theory of Multiple Intelligences by Howard Gardner (1993) which proposes the idea that learners have various levels of intelligence across a range of intellectual areas.

As conveyed by Naparan and Alinsug (2021), in teaching multi-grade classes, teachers not only use collaborative learning as a learning approach but also use differentiated instruction (DI). According to their study, multi-grade teachers make the most of each student's unique ability by assigning specific assignments to certain pupils so the teacher can attend to the requirements of the other students in the class. This is to address all learner needs and styles and also maximize the teaching period at the same time.

Also, Roy's (1970) Adaptation Model gives inputs and ideas that were important in the conduct of this study. This theory emphasizes that humans are in constant interaction with their environment or surroundings. Thus, to respond to the stimuli they encounter in their environment, people have both an innate and an acquired system of adaptation or coping. Moreover, according to this model, coping or adaptation happens when a person responds positively to changes in environment, and is the process of individuals using self-reflection, conscious awareness, and personal choice. Thus, adaptive responses may vary in every individual and may take a longer time compared to others ((Bsn, 2023).

### 1.4. Definition of Terms

In order to provide common reference among the readers, the following terms were defined:

Adaptation. This term means the ability to adjust to new surroundings or a new situation. An organism's fitness may depend on its ability to adjust behavior (Lourenco & Casey, 2013). As used in this study, the term implies the competencies of the teachers to adapt to and cope with the needs of handling multi-grade classes.

Classroom management strategy. This term means the action teachers take to create a supportive environment for the academic and social-emotional learning of students (Korpershoek et al., 2016). As used in this study, it is one factor considered in the coping strategies employed by teachers in handling multi-grade classes.

Coping mechanism. This term means a technique to minimize stressful events and reduce conflict (Naparan & Castañeda, 2021). As used in this study, this term refers to the technique and strategy employed by teachers in conducting multi-grade teaching.

Curriculum management and organization. This term means identifying the interactions that are established between what belongs to the educational sphere, such as educational change policies and curriculum mode, and the practices of participants in a living, dynamic reality in which the aspiration is to give sense and realization to curriculum (Tirado & Barriga, 2016). As used in this study, it is one factor considered in the coping strategies employed by teachers in handling multi-grade classes.

Level of resilience. This term refers to the level of ability or power to overcome hardness, stress, and deprivation (Erdogan et al., 2015). As used in this study, this refers to the level of teachers' capacity to adapt and cope with handling multi-grade classes.

Material resource. This term refers to the conditions needed to ensure the success of the teaching process (Acatrinei & Popovici, 2021). As used in this study, it is one factor considered in the coping strategies employed by teachers in handling multi-grade classes.

Methodological aspect. This term refers to how the teacher plans and designs their teaching activity (Acatrinei & Popovici, 2021). As used in this study, it is one factor considered in the coping strategies employed by teachers in handling multi-grade classes.

Multi-grade class. This term means that children who fall into different age brackets are taught by one teacher in one class at the same time (Kivunja & Sims, 2015). As used in this study, this term refers to the main type of educational program or class handled by the teachers investigated or surveyed in this study.

Multi-grade teaching. This term means a practice in which learners from different ages, skill levels, and class levels continue their education and training together in the same class and are taught by one teacher (Velasco, Ramos, & Azarias, 2022). As used in this study, this term refers to the practice of the teacher-participants, wherein the learners they teach come from different grade levels.

Teacher's resilience. This term is about the ability to stand against the natural stressors and setbacks of teaching as a tough profession (Wang, 2021). As used in this study, the ability of teachers to face challenges in teaching multi-grade classes will be surveyed.

Time management. This term is about the proper listing of daily priority activities (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021). As used in this study, it is one factor considered in the coping strategies employed by teachers in handling multi-grade classes.

## 2. Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methods and procedures that were employed to systematically answer the specific research questions posed in this study.

### 2.1. Research Design

This study used a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences, challenges, and resiliency of teachers handling multi-grade classes. A phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that defines the meaning of a lived experience of a phenomenon for several persons, which, in this instance, is the experience of teachers in coping with multi-grade teaching. This research used in-depth interview as the main strategy for the phenomenological approach. The findings from the interviews provide greater depth and understanding as to how the teacher feels about handling multi-grade classes. Moreover, the analysis of data was facilitated using Microsoft Word.

## 2.2. Locale of the Study

This research study was conducted at multi-grade schools found in Motiong District, which is a school district under the Division of Samar. It is situated in the municipality of Motiong, Samar.
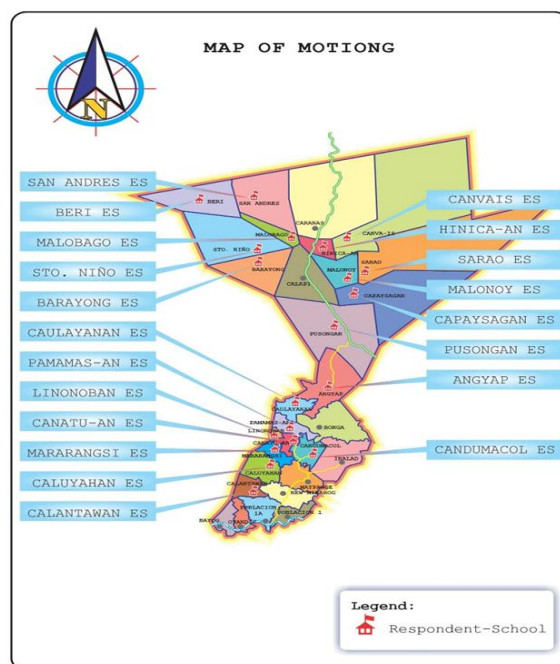


Fig. 2. Map Showing the Locale of the Study

## 2.3. Sampling Procedure

The participants for this study were selected by purposive sampling and consisted of multi-grade teachers in Motiong district. Purposive sampling is the main technique used in a qualitative method of research and was the sampling technique used in this phase to select the participants. According to Englander (2012), it is the researcher's responsibility to select participants or respondents who show specific experience of the phenomenon.

Moreover, according to Guest et al. (2006), data saturation can occur within the first 10–12 interviews. In this study, ten (10) participants reached the saturation point. Saturation happens when the addition of more participants to the study does not result in additional perceptions and information. It is the moment when there is no more fresh or pertinent data to be obtained from the data collection process.

The researcher also made a checklist of the selection criteria for the participants of this study: a) respondents or participants were required to be multi-grade teachers; b) they belong to Motiong district; and c) they are willing to be interviewed in connection with the study.

**Table A**

**Demographic Information of Teacher-Participants**

| Participant | Age (yrs) | Sex | Civil Status | Highest Educational Attainment | No. of Years Teaching Multi-Grade Class | Grade Level/s Handled | Total No. of Learners |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MG1 | 27 | F | Single | Master's Degree Unit Earner | 4 | Grade 5 & Grade 6 | 4 |
| MG2 | 29 | F | Single | Master's Degree Unit Earner | 5 | Kindergarten, Grade 1, & Grade 2 | 5 |
| MG3 | 32 | F | Married | Master's Degree Unit Earner | 5 | Grade 1 & Grade 2 | 7 |
| MG4 | 34 | F | Married | Master's Degree Unit Earner | 8 | Kindergarten, Grade 1, & Grade 2 | 15 |
| MG5 | 41 | F | Married | Bachelor's Degree Holder | 5 | Kindergarten &Grade 1 | 5 |
| MG6 | 27 | F | Married | Master's Degree Unit Earner | 4 | Grade 5 & Grade 6 | 9 |
| MG7 | 43 | F | Married | Bachelor's Degree Holder | 10 | Grade 5 & Grade 6 | 11 |
| MG8 | 40 | F | Married | Bachelor's Degree Holder | 14 | Grade 5 & Grade 6 | 14 |
| MG9 | 45 | F | Married | Master's Degree Unit Earner | 21 | Grade 3 & Grade 4 | 13 |
| MG10 | 29 | M | Single | Master's Degree Unit Earner | 5 | Grade 1 & Grade 2 | 16 |

As reflected in the table, the total participants consisted of ten (10) multi-grade teachers. There are nine (9) females and one (1) male. The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 45. Three are BS degree holders, and seven are Master's degree unit earners. All of them are teaching multi-grade classes.

*2.4. Instrumentation*

This study used a semi-structured interview guide comprising semi-structured open-ended questions. This was the main research instrument in obtaining all the necessary information for this phase. The main research question addressed is, "How do teacher-respondents become resilient to the challenges they have encountered in teaching multi-grade classes? ".

## 2.5. Validation of the Instrument

The semi-structured interview guide was the main instrument in gathering the data in this phase and was first validated through the following procedures: initially, a draft of the semi-structured interview guide was submitted to the research adviser for content validation, where the latter indicated the corrections, suggestions, and recommendations for the refinement of the content. Upon incorporation of all the adviser's corrections, suggestions, and recommendations, the semi-structured interview guide was submitted to the members of the panel. All comments and suggestions of the members of the expert validation of the research instrument were considered and incorporated.

## 2.6. Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher wrote a letter of approval to the school head, asking permission to conduct a survey with the target teacher respondents. The letter of approval was presented to other authorities involved in this study. In gathering the data, the participants were personally informed of the objective of the study, and they were also provided with a letter indicating the title and purpose of the study. Then, the researcher asked the teacher-participants for their participation.

In conducting the in-depth interview, the researcher asked permission from the teacher-participants to record their responses during the interview. Also, a semi-structured interview guide was used.

Furthermore, the in-depth interview was personally facilitated and conducted by the researcher herself. It was conducted for 20–30 minutes in order to get the comprehensive information needed for this study.

The participants were allowed to speak in English, Filipino, and Waray-Waray languages during the conduct of the interview. However, throughout the course of this study, the English language was mostly used by the participants.

The interview and gathering of data were conducted during the vacant time of the teacher-participants.

## 2.7. Thematic Analysis

Colaizzi's phenomenological descriptive method served as the model for the data analysis used in this investigation (Alzayani, 2015).

The researcher listened to all the recorded interview data in the smartphone many times before the transcription. This was done directly after the in-depth interview with the participants.

The use of Colaizzi's process for phenomenological data analysis in the study were the following: (1) each transcript was read and re-read to acquire a general idea about the content; (2) significant statements were extracted in each transcript and recorded in a separate paper; (3) meanings were created from the formulated significant statements; (4) formulated meanings were sorted into categories, clusters of themes and themes; (5) the findings were integrated into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under study; (6) then, the researcher identified essential structure of the phenomenon; and lastly (7) results were validated through returning to participants  and showing the results to them in order to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.
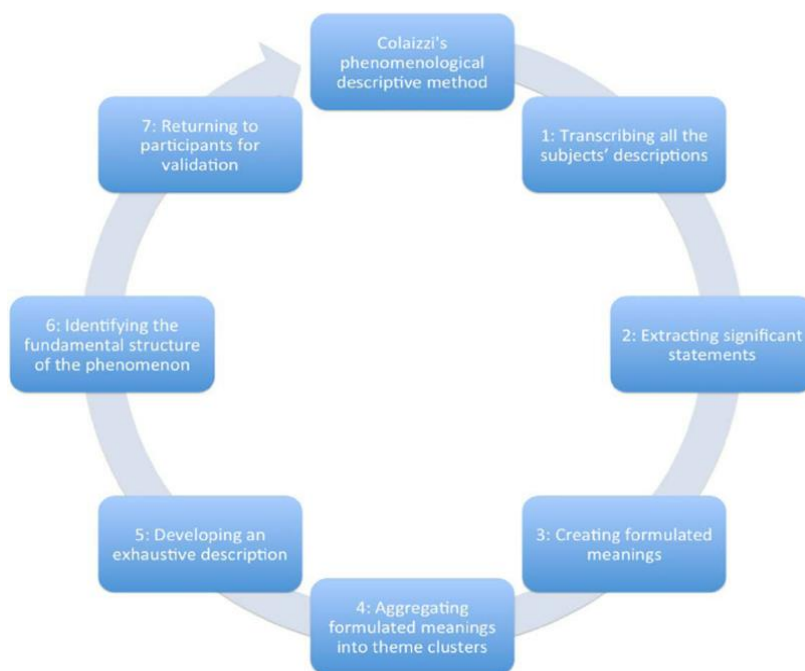
Fig. 3. Colaizzi's Process (Colaizzi, 1978)

## 3. Results and Discussion

The results of the study were presented as follows: findings of the experiences and challenges encountered by the multi-grade teachers and resiliency of teachers in handling multi-grade classes which were presented in theoretical Themes or categories.

Four major themes emerged in this study that would best describe the resiliency of teachers in handling multi-grade classes: (1) Multi-grade classes are handling two or more classes in a single classroom; (2) Multi-grade teaching is beneficial to teachers and learners; (3) Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes; and (4) Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers.

**Challenges and Experiences Encountered by the Multi-Grade Teachers**

**Theme 1. Multi-grade classes are handling two or more classes in a single classroom.** The following utterances proved/supported Theme 1: **Multi-grade classes are handling two or more classes in a single classroom:**

MGT1: "It is handling two or more grade levels."

MGT2: "A combined classes in one setting/classroom."

MGT3: "A multi-grade classroom simply means that there is more than one grade in the room, working independently or together."

MGT4: "Handling two or more classes."

MGT6: "For me a multi-grade class consists of two or more different grade levels in a single grade classroom"

MGT7: "I think a multi-grade classroom refers to a class that has two or more grade level of children in one classroom"

MGT8: "Learners from two or more grade level are in one class, and learning simultaneously"

MGT9: "This class incorporates more than one grade in a classroom"

MG10: "Several grade levels are taught simultaneously in the same classroom by one teacher"

**Theme 2. Multi-grade teaching is beneficial to teachers and learners (Subtheme 2.1 Multi-grade class allows flexible learning). The following utterances proved/supported Theme 2: Multi-grade teaching is beneficial to teachers and learners (Subtheme 2.1 Multi-grade class allows flexible learning):**

MGT1: "It allows the learners and teachers to be flexible."

MGT2: "Teaching-Learning process became flexible..."

MGT8: "One benefit that we can get from multi-grade classes is that they offer flexibility to meet our learners' needs."

MGT9: "I regularly provide flexible groupings for differentiated learning."

MG10: "I make sure to provide flexible learning materials for my varied students."

**Theme 2. Multi-grade teaching is beneficial to teachers and learners (Subtheme 2.2 Multi-grade class result in cooperative learning). The following utterances proved/supported Theme 2: Multi-grade teaching is beneficial to teachers and learners (Subtheme 2.2 Multi-grade class result in cooperative learning):**

MGT2: "Teaching-Learning process became … collaborative."

MGT3: "In multi-grade classroom there are opportunities for collaboration."

MGT6: "In my multi-grade class setting, I involve learners from two grade levels to learn together in a single classroom. I let them cooperate with one another."

**Theme 2. Multi-grade teaching is beneficial to teachers and learners (Subtheme 2.3 A multi-grade allowance is provided to teachers). The following utterances proved/supported Theme 2: Multi-grade teaching is beneficial to teachers and learners (Subtheme 2.3 A multi-grade allowance is provided to teachers):**

MGT4: "I receive multi-grade allowance."

MGT5: "There is multi-grade allowance although distribution of allowance is late"

MGT7: "I can say that one benefit of multi-grade teaching is that our institution provides us allowance for making lesson materials intended for multi-grade learners."

**Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.1 Learners' lack of interest and struggles with acquiring knowledge). The following utterances proved/ support Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.1 Learners' lack of interest and struggles with acquiring knowledge):**

MGT1: "I have one pupil who does not participate when I am in a class discussion."

MGT3: "My students tend to have more absences. So, for me, students' absenteeism is a big challenge."

MGT5: "Slow learners tend to ask again and again after giving instructions the time where you're already teaching in other grade."

MGT9: "Some learners will not listen to the discussion with the teacher because they may already know the topic."

MGT10: "There are also some students that have difficulty coping in a combined class."

**Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.2 Difficulty and unpreparedness in teaching multi-grade classes). The following utterances proved/ support Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.2 Difficulty and unpreparedness in teaching multi-grade classes):**

MGT2: "I experience difficulty in preparing two lessons with two different competencies."

MGT4: "Yes, the different strategies that I'm going to use to the different grade level is a challenge on my part."

MGT5: "Lots of preparation, an additional work."

MGT6: "I consider myself not totally prepared in teaching multiple classes since I have no training in teaching this kind of classroom."

MGT8: "I am having difficulty teaching learners in multi-grade classes since I only attended one training about multi-grade teaching."

**Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.3 Poor time management). The following utterances proved/ support Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.3 Poor time management):**

MGT2: "Time pressured. I have lots of activities for my learners from two different grade levels; however, I have limited time to give activities and discuss all the topics in one setting."

MGT3: "As teachers, we have too much workload. Thus, I am having hard time managing my class and accomplishing paperwork at the same time."

MGT4: "In multi-grade classroom lack of time is the main disadvantage."

MGT5: "Multi-grade classes exert a multi-task for teachers; aside from having lots of ancillary work coordinatorship, there is also preparation of the instructional materials for meeting the competencies in every subject per grade level in one time and then entertaining the questions from other grades while you are teaching the other grades. This makes it difficult for me to manage my time as a multi-grade teacher."

MGT7: "It is sometimes difficult both for the teacher and the students. Difficult for the teacher because need to prepare two or more teaching plan, time consuming."

MGT9: "The teacher will have a hard time managing the learning activities based on the time allotted".

**Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.4 Limited classroom space). The following utterances proved/ support Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.4 Limited classroom space):**

MGT2: "Classroom space is not enough with the number of students per grade level."

MGT10: "Having two grade levels in one class, the space in my classroom is not enough to cater to all my learners' needs."

**Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.5 Lack of learning materials, resources and facilities). The following utterances proved/ support Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.5 Lack of learning materials, resources, and facilities):**

MGT2: "We don't have a functional library in our school."

MGT3: " There is no functional library or learning center available in our school. Also, having no stable internet connection can add to your burden as a multi-grade teacher. We cannot provide the different research topics, strategies, and approaches to be applied in the teaching and learning process."

MGT4: "No library in my school and when it comes to internet slow connection."

MGT5: "With internet but it's slow and unstable, it's not accessible for me to use the internet during my class."

**Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.6 Difficult means of transportation).** The following utterances proved/ support Theme 3: Teachers face varied challenges in handling multi-grade classes (Subtheme 3.6 Difficult means of transportation):

MGT3: "The teaching in multi-grade class is very tricky and challenging for teachers, handling multiple grades in one class at the same time is very stressful, but teachers also face intrinsic challenges, such as how to reach school which is far away from home, off course dangerous ways, roads."

MGT6: "Another challenge for me is the distance from my home to my station. I ride a motorcycle on a rough road for about 30 minutes and then walk for a long distance for another 30 minutes."

**Resiliency of Teachers in handling
Multi-grade Classes**

**Theme 1. Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers. (Subtheme 1.1 Curriculum Management and Organization).** The following utterances proved/ support Theme 1: Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers. (Subtheme 1.1 Curriculum Management and Organization):

MGT1: "I follow the most essential learning competencies stipulated in our teaching and learning guide."

MGT2: "I follow the principle of easy to hard or complex topic so that my learners will learn effectively."

MGT3: "By considering the diversity within and between groups, engaging your students, and keeping them focused on learning."

MGT4: "In dividing classes by their grade level, the strategies I use for my learners are what are suited to them".

MGT7: "I try to fit my classroom instruction to their level or readiness."

**Theme 1. Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers. (Subtheme 1.2 Classroom Management Strategies).** The following utterances proved/ support Theme 1: Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers. (Subtheme 1.2 Classroom Management Strategies):

MGT1: "I used some approaches such as direct observation, guidance of a peer group students and direct teaching."

MGT2:" "I apply differentiated teaching-learning strategies. Differentiated Instruction for me is the best strategy to deal with the multi needs of my learners."

MGT3: "In multi-grade classroom, several simultaneous activities go on at the same time. You therefore need to arrange the classroom for activities that engage students with minimum disturbance and with adequate direction and supervision. Your task becomes especially crucial informing various kinds of groups: this largely depends on the nature and purpose of the subject taken up for study at a particular time. Some subjects may require mixed-ability group while others benefit from whole-class groups, some may require peer tutoring while others require independent assignments and self-directed learning with systematic support from you and peer tutor."

MGT3: "As a multi-grade teacher, you are the key to planning, designing, and managing a range of both grade-appropriate and mixed-grade activities for children to keep them engaged in learning. Your efficiency and effectiveness rest on creating a classroom conducive to learning by planning and organizing your classroom to get the best results from the space and resources available to you."

MGT5: "I group the class equally by the number of students I have, and I always group them with fast and slow learners. Also, I apply direct teaching, interactive discussion, learning by doing, and use a real-life situation as an example for lifelong learning."

**Theme 1. Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers. (Subtheme 1.3 Methodological aspects). The following utterances proved/ support Theme 1: Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers. (Subtheme 1.3 Methodological aspects):**

MGT1: "First, I consider the materials that are available in my station that I can use as my instructional materials that the pupils can relate to. I did contextualization in terms of daily situations and the availability of materials."

MGT2: "I always prepare a printout material for me to have time discussing lesson to other class while the other doing the activities."

MGT5: "Before the day of teaching, I prepare the IMs and print the worksheet so they'll not take time to write sometimes, but most of the time I encourage my learners to write or to practice spelling and composition of sentences."

MGT7: "I consider the learning style of my students in understanding certain topics. I plan and design lesson instruction based on this."

**Theme 1. Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers. (Subtheme 1.4 Material resources). The following utterances proved/ support Theme 1: Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers. (Subtheme 1.4 Material resources):**

MGT2: "There is a network signal in our school; we just need to buy a load to access the internet…So, I sometimes use the internet" to provide educational videos."

MGT4: "As a millennial teacher I used localized materials in teaching and technology as medial instructions."

MGT5: "There is a functional library in our school, so I let my learners read books in our library."

MGT8: "There is an internet connection in our area; I download learning videos and show them to my class."

MGT10: "I used instructional materials that are suited to the learners and that are easily understood by the pupils."

**Theme 1. Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers. (Subtheme 1.5 Time management). The following utterances proved/ support Theme 1: Coping mechanism are being employed by multi-grade teachers. (Subtheme 1.5 Time management):**

MGT1: "By managing my time by setting a specific time to do some activities or documents needed in teaching a multi-grade class. I also used direct teaching in other class while giving some activities in other class."

MGT2: "If it is a different competency, I usually prepare two modes of delivery. For one, I use slide decks for the other class, while for the other, I prepare printed print out Materials. It is literally time-consuming. But sometimes, if the competencies are the same since I am handling Grades 5 and 6, I usually make one lesson, but during evaluation, I administer different levels of difficulty in the same context of the discussion."

MGT3: "The secret to being a successful multi-grade teacher is to balance your time effectively. This is a challenge when addressing the different learning needs of groups and individual students, but preparing a variety of activities beforehand that keep all groups of students engaged in the multi-grade environment is an opportunity to develop new and more effective teaching practices."

MGT4: "It is very hard to be a multi-grade teacher like me I handle 3 classes. In terms of giving activity I use differentiated instruction na lang to maximize my time of teaching instruction."

MGT5: "I teach only what is needed."

MGT9: "If there is similar competency with my two grade levels handled, I usually prepare one lesson only and vary only in the assessment part."

## 4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, handling multi-grade classes resulted to a number of challenges experienced by teachers. Therefore, there is a vital need to address the challenges encountered by the multi-grade teachers.

The following were the conclusion formulated based on the findings of the study:

1.     Multi-grade teachers observed that multi-grade teaching is beneficial as it allows flexible learning and provides an opportunity for cooperative learning. Differentiated learning or instruction is emphasized in this kind of teaching.

2.     However, the study found that teacher-respondents encountered a number of challenges in handling multi-grade classes.

3.     Teachers highlighted that they were having a hard time adjusting to multi-grade teaching because of numerous reasons: learners' lack of interest and struggles with acquiring knowledge; teachers' difficulty and unpreparedness in teaching multi-grade classes (no or limited trainings attended); teachers' poor time management; limited classroom space; a lack of learning materials, resources, and facilities; and difficult means of transportation.

4.     However, the teacher-respondents are perceived as resilient as they try to do the following actions to cope with multi-grade teaching: following the most essential learning competencies specified in the teaching and learning guide, following the teaching principle of easy to hard or complex topics, utilizing varied teaching approaches such as differentiated teaching, direct observation, peer-teaching, and flexible teaching-learning, preparing instructional materials before the day of the class, considering learners diverse learning styles, using localized materials, the internet, and libraries, and managing and maximizing time effectively are ways to adapt to or cope with the multi-grade teaching and learning process.

## 5. Recommendations

The researcher humbly recommend that several challenges encountered by teachers in handling multi-grade classes must be addressed by the concerned authority.

The following are the recommendations based on the findings and conclusions:

1.     Conduct further professional trainings and seminars for teachers related to multi-grade teaching, as it would help them adapt to this kind of teaching and be able to effectively convey their knowledge to the learners;

2.     Provide teachers with guidelines and procedures on the use of differentiated teaching, and other relevant teaching approaches and strategies so that the multi-grade teacher can effectively employ the different approaches in teaching;

3.     Provide additional teacher and learner materials that will help the multi-grade teachers get the interest and attention of every learner;

4.     Provide exceptional teaching materials that will help the teachers upgrade themselves in terms of the appropriate technique and strategy to be used during the conduct of multi-grade classes;

5.     Further studies and research regarding the coping mechanisms of multi-grade teachers are recommended, but in different settings and with larger samples.

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