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Multigrade Educational Frameworks in Southeast Asia and the Lived Experiences of Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the multigrade educational framework in Southeast Asia and the realities of multigrade teachers in Bayugan City Division, Philippines. It aimed to explore the conduct of multigrade classes, teachers' challenges, policy-practice gaps, needed support systems, and a proposed action plan for strengthening multigrade teaching. The study used a qualitative phenomenological design complemented by a systematic literature review of twelve selected studies. Eighteen multigrade teachers from ten public elementary schools were purposively selected and interviewed using semi-structured questions. Data were analyzed through thematic coding. Findings revealed that multigrade teaching involves flexible, contextualized, differentiated, and peer-supported instruction. However, teachers faced challenges related to workload, limited resources, policy misalignment, insufficient training, learner readiness, parental support, and geographic and technological barriers. Multigrade education continues to serve an important role in underserved school contexts, but its effectiveness depends on responsive policies, coordinated support systems, and context-specific interventions. The proposed EMPOWER-MG action plan may help strengthen multigrade teaching practices and improve support for teachers and learners.

INTRODUCTION

Multigrade education remains a practical strategy for sustaining access to basic education in geographically isolated, rural, and low-enrolment communities. Cornish and Taole (2021) explained that multigrade schools remain common in rural areas and require context-specific teaching support because teachers handle learners from different grade levels within one classroom. Across Southeast Asia, multigrade teaching supports schooling in rural, remote, and low-enrolment communities, but it also presents instructional and organizational demands. Naparan and Alinsug (2021) found that multigrade teachers use classroom management, collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, contextualized teaching, and flexibility to address varied learner needs. Shareefa *et al.* (2021) also noted that limited time and heavy workload make differentiated instruction more challenging in multigrade settings. In the Philippines, recent education policies support multigrade teaching through curriculum flexibility and teacher welfare provisions. DepEd Order No. 012, s. 2024 allows flexible class programming based on school context and teacher availability, while DepEd Order No. 005, s. 2024 rationalizes teachers' workload and payment of teaching overload in public schools. Despite these policy provisions, gaps remain between national frameworks and actual multigrade classroom conditions. Ares-Ferreirós *et al.* (2025) noted that multigrade teaching continues to face structural challenges, including limited human and material resources, insufficient teacher training, and workload demands. OECD (2021) also emphasized that workload and stress remain important concerns in strengthening teacher well-being, showing

the need for more responsive and supportive school systems. This study examined the multigrade educational framework in Southeast Asia and the professional realities of multigrade teachers in Bayugan City Division, Philippines. It explored the conduct of multigrade classes, teachers' challenges, policy-practice gaps, needed support systems, and a proposed action plan to strengthen multigrade teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multigrade Education in Southeast Asia: Access and Context

In the Philippines, Naparan and Alinsug (2021) showed that multigrade teachers use flexible routines, peer tutoring, and differentiated instruction to sustain learning. In Indonesia, Raihani and Sari (2022) emphasized the need for coherent policy implementation and training support. In Malaysia, Hiew and Hamid (2023) highlighted leadership, scheduling, and shared planning as important conditions for effective combined-class arrangements, indicating that multigrade education in Southeast Asia is commonly shaped by rurality, low enrolment, teacher shortage, language diversity, and uneven resource distribution.

Pedagogical and Structural Arrangements Teacher Work and Classroom Practice

Chainey and Cassity (2021) found that mentoring, peer learning groups, observation, and feedback strengthen teacher confidence and instructional leadership. Wong and Hollingsworth (2021) also noted that curriculum reform in Lao PDR requires targeted training and community

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engagement suggesting that multigrade teaching depends not only on teacher skill but also on sustained structural and professional support.

Systemic and External Challenges Workload, Resources, and Learner Needs

Daga (2021) identified concerns in planning, assessment, classroom management, monitoring, and reporting among multigrade teachers. Tayoni and Abocejo (2023) further reported implementation weaknesses in training, learning resources, facilities, and monitoring. In Cambodia, Marshall (2022) showed that learning disruption and rural disadvantage increase pressure on teachers, especially in settings with limited instructional support highlighting that multigrade teachers commonly face workload demands, limited materials, insufficient training, and diverse learner needs.

Policy–Practice Gap Frameworks and Classroom Realities

In the Philippines, Daga (2021) noted that multigrade implementation is shaped by workload demands, limited resources, and assessment responsibilities. Tayoni and Abocejo (2023) also showed that the Multigrade Education Program still faces gaps in resources, teacher preparation, and monitoring suggesting that policy support must be translated into practical classroom assistance, contextualized training, and responsive teacher support.

Support Systems Strengthening Multigrade Teaching

Hiew and Hamid (2023) emphasized the role of school leadership in scheduling, planning, and monitoring. Yusoff *et al.* (2025) highlighted the importance of professional development, resources, and collaborative learning communities for differentiated pedagogy. SEAMEO INNOTECH (2021) also stressed institutional support as essential in helping teachers move from reactive coping towards more organized and sustainable multigrade practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design, complemented by a systematic literature review (SLR), to examine multigrade educational frameworks in Southeast Asia and the lived experiences

of multigrade teachers within their authentic classroom contexts in Bayugan City, Philippines.

Research Participants

In this study, 18 multigrade teachers were chosen through purposive sampling, a non-probability technique where participants are deliberately selected based on their relevance to the research questions, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the study's central focus (Javed *et al.*, 2024).

Research Locale

The study was conducted in ten public elementary schools with multigrade classrooms in the Bayugan City Division, Philippines. These schools implement multigrade instruction due to limited enrolment and staffing, with 17 to 84 pupils and two to five multigrade teachers handling multiple grade levels in one classroom.

Research Instruments

This study used an SLR matrix to synthesize literature on Southeast Asian multigrade education and a semi-structured interview guide to explore the lived realities of multigrade teachers in Bayugan City Division.

Treatment of Data

The study employed thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within the qualitative data, following the six-phase process of Clarke and Braun (2021). This involved data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review and refinement, theme naming, and the production of an analytic narrative reflecting the lived realities of multigrade teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conduct of Multigrade Classes in Southeast Asian Countries

The analysis examined how multigrade classes are conducted in Southeast Asian countries, particularly in the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar. Table 1 shows that multigrade teaching is carried out through staggered or simultaneous instruction, differentiated and contextualized teaching, flexible lesson adaptation, classroom management strategies, resource improvisation, selective technology use, and the organization of classes in rural, remote, and low-enrolment communities.

Table 1: Included Studies in the Systematic Literature Review on the Conduct of Multigrade Classes in Southeast Asian Countries

Country	Key Findings	Key Theme
Philippines	flexible teaching and classroom management (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021); combined-class organization (Daga, 2021)staged instruction in remote settings (Sercola, 2024)	Staggered or simultaneous teaching across grade levels
Malaysia	learner-readiness adjustment (Yusoff <i>et al.</i> , 2025); modified mixed-grade strategies (Ahmad, 2025); differentiated instruction and achievement (Setambah <i>et al.</i> , 2025)	Differentiated instruction as a central pedagogical approach

Indonesia	real-life lesson connection (Hestiana, 2022); inclusive rural lesson adaptation (Pranata & Syamsijulianto, 2024); instruction adjusted to remote barriers (Takdir, 2021)	Contextualized teaching and flexible lesson adaptation
Cambodia	classroom management as core strategy (Galanida, 2025); planning and management challenges (Global Partnership for Education, 2025); management of diverse grade levels (UNESCO, 2025)	Classroom management embedded in pedagogy
Lao PDR	technology integration despite limits (Ministry of Education and Sports and BEQUAL, 2025); adaptive resource use (Fukami, 2024); limited rural internet access (UN ESCAP, 2024)	Resource improvisation and selective technology use
Myanmar	multigrade classes in remote schools (Drinan & Hardman, 2024); schooling continuity in low-enrolment areas (World Bank, 2023); expanded access through small-school models (UNICEF Myanmar, 2024)	Rural, remote, and low-enrolment organization for access and inclusion

Staggered or Simultaneous Teaching Across Grade Levels. Multigrade teaching requires teachers to shift flexibly between whole-class, group-based, and independent tasks to address varied grade-level competencies. Naparan and Alinsug (2021) found that teachers use flexible teaching and classroom management strategies, Daga (2021) described combined-class instruction for learners at different levels, and Sercola (2024) showed that staged instruction helps organize teaching in remote multigrade settings.

Differentiated Instruction as a Central Pedagogical Approach. Multigrade teachers adjust instruction based on learners' readiness, ability, grade level, and pace of learning. Yusoff *et al.* (2025) found that differentiated instruction responds to varied learner readiness, Ahmad (2025) emphasized the modification of strategies for mixed-grade learners, and Setambah *et al.* (2025) linked differentiated instruction with pupils' academic achievement.

Contextualized Teaching and Flexible Lesson Adaptation. Multigrade teaching requires lessons to be connected to learners' real-life contexts, rural conditions, and available resources. Hestiana (2022) found that lessons become meaningful when connected to real-life situations, Pranata and Syamsijulianto (2024) showed that lesson adaptation supports inclusive rural instruction, and Takdir (2021) emphasized the adjustment of teaching in response to obstacles in remote settings.

Classroom Management Embedded in Pedagogy. Classroom management in multigrade settings functions as part of instruction rather than as a separate task. Galanida (2025) identified classroom management as a core multigrade strategy, Global Partnership for Education (2025) highlighted challenges in planning, instruction,

and classroom management, and UNESCO (2025) described the management of diverse grade levels as part of multifaceted pedagogy.

Resource Improvisation and Selective Technology Use. Multigrade teachers maximize available materials and use technology only when classroom conditions allow. The Ministry of Education and Sports and BEQUAL (2025) emphasized technology integration despite classroom limitations, Fukami (2024) showed the use of adaptive resources and strategies, and UN ESCAP (2024) noted that limited internet connectivity constrains digital tool use in rural classrooms.

Rural, Remote, and Low-Enrolment Organization for Access and Inclusion. Multigrade classes are organized to sustain schooling where separate monograde classes are not feasible. Drinan and Hardman (2024) noted the presence of multigrade classes in remote elementary schools, the World Bank (2023) emphasized schooling continuity in low-enrolment rural contexts, and UNICEF Myanmar (2024) highlighted expanded access through single-teacher and small-school multigrade models.

Pedagogical Frameworks and Structures of Multigrade Education in Relation to the Professional Lived Experiences of Multigrade Teachers. The analysis examined how the pedagogical frameworks and structures of multigrade education operate in relation to the professional lived experiences of multigrade teachers, particularly in Malaysia, the Philippines, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. Table 2 shows that these frameworks and structures are reflected in workload and time fragmentation, resource scarcity and rural conditions, professional isolation and limited training, teacher resilience and adaptive agency, emotional labor and moral commitment, and the need for system support, collaboration, and policy fit.

Table 2: Included Studies in the Systematic Literature Review on Pedagogical Frameworks and Structures of Multigrade Education in Relation to the Professional Lived Experiences of Multigrade Teachers

Country	Key Findings	Key Theme
Malaysia	planning difficulty (Puspanathan & Mahmud, 2025); time limits and instructional coherence challenges (Tahir <i>et al.</i> , 2025); workload and limited preparation time (Yusoff <i>et al.</i> , 2025)	Workload and time fragmentation shape teachers' daily experience
Philippines	limited materials and diverse learner needs (Bagay, 2025); remote school challenges (Naparan & Castañeda, 2021); weak connectivity and rural constraints (Catama <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	Resource scarcity and rural conditions intensify professional strain

Lao PDR	limited mentoring and specialist support (UNESCO CapED, 2021); monograde-focused teacher preparation (BEQUAL, 2025); need for targeted professional development (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2025)	Professional isolation and limited training affect confidence and practice
Cambodia	coping strategies for multigrade demands (Galanida, 2025); coping mechanisms and aspirations (MoEYS, 2021); adaptive practices such as peer tutoring and technology integration (UNESCO, 2022)	Teachers respond with resilience, flexibility, and adaptive agency
Thailand	teacher burnout and instructional pressure (Hongsa & Polyong, 2024); patience, passion, and professional development (Ratanasiripong <i>et al.</i> , 2021); commitment in remote multigrade teaching (EEF, 2025)	Multigrade teaching demands emotional labor and moral commitment
Myanmar	school management support for differentiated instruction (Drinan & Hardman, 2024); teacher quality, collaboration, and materials (UNICEF Myanmar, 2024); need for stronger structural support (World Bank, 2023)	Quality multigrade teaching depends on system support, collaboration, and policy fit

Workload and Time Fragmentation Shape Teachers' Daily Experience. Multigrade teachers' daily work is shaped by planning demands, divided instructional time, and the need to maintain learning continuity across grade levels. Puspanathan and Mahmud (2025) noted difficulties in planning multigrade instruction, Tahir *et al.* (2025) found that time limits affect instructional coherence, and Yusoff *et al.* (2025) showed that workload and limited preparation time constrain differentiated instruction.

Resource Scarcity and Rural Conditions Intensify Professional Strain. Limited materials, rural conditions, and weak connectivity increase the professional strain of multigrade teachers. Bagay (2025) found that limited resources affect teachers' response to diverse learner needs, Naparan and Castañeda (2021) documented system-related challenges in remote multigrade settings, and Catama *et al.* (2021) noted that weak connectivity restricts technology-supported instruction.

Professional Isolation and Limited Training Affect Confidence and Practice. Insufficient mentoring, limited training, and monograde-focused preparation affect teachers' confidence in handling multigrade classrooms. UNESCO CapED (2021) highlighted limited mentoring support, BEQUAL (2025) noted the mismatch between teacher preparation and multigrade realities, and the Ministry of Education and Sports (2025) emphasized the need for targeted professional development.

Teachers Respond with Resilience, Flexibility, and Adaptive Agency. Multigrade teachers actively adjust their practices to sustain learning despite limited resources and complex classroom demands. Galanida (2025) identified coping strategies for multigrade teaching, MoEYS (2021) highlighted teachers' coping mechanisms and aspirations,

and UNESCO (2022) emphasized peer tutoring, differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and technology integration as adaptive practices.

Multigrade Teaching Demands Emotional Labor and Moral Commitment. Multigrade teaching involves emotional effort, patience, and commitment beyond instructional tasks. Hongsa and Polyong (2024) linked teaching demands with burnout and pressure, Ratanasiripong *et al.* (2021) emphasized patience, passion, and professional development, and EEF (2025) highlighted teachers' continued commitment in remote multigrade contexts.

Quality Multigrade Teaching Depends on System Support, Collaboration, and Policy Fit. Effective multigrade teaching depends on supportive leadership, collaboration, materials, and policies aligned with classroom realities. Drinan and Hardman (2024) showed the importance of school management support, UNICEF Myanmar (2024) emphasized teacher quality, collaboration, and learning materials, and the World Bank (2023) highlighted the need for stronger structural support in rural education systems.

Experiences of Multigrade Teachers in Bayugan City

The analysis examined the experiences of multigrade teachers in Bayugan City as they managed multiple grade levels in diverse and resource-constrained classroom settings. Table 3 shows that their experiences were reflected in teacher collaboration, school leadership and technical assistance, community and stakeholder support, resourcefulness and creativity, and fulfillment, patience, and love for multigrade teaching.

Table 3: Themes and Sub-Themes on the Experiences of Multigrade Teachers of Bayugan City

Themes	Sub-Themes	Core Ideas
Collaboration as a Source of Professional Support	Peer guidance for new multigrade teachers	collegial guidance
	Teacher collaboration in small schools	shared teaching support
	Mutual help among teachers	mutual school assistance

School Leadership and Technical Assistance Support Teaching	Regular monitoring and feedback	constructive monitoring
	Technical assistance and coaching	classroom coaching
	Guidance in lesson planning	multigrade lesson planning support
Community and Stakeholder Support Motivates Teachers and Learners	NGO support motivates learners	learner motivation support
	External support eases teaching challenges	reduced teaching burden
	Stakeholder participation in school activities	active school participation
Resourcefulness and Creativity in Teaching	Creativity despite challenges	creative problem-solving
	Localization of learning activities	localized learner activities
	Combining lessons across grade levels	integrated grade-level lessons
Fulfillment, Patience, and Love for Multigrade Teaching	Overcoming long-term challenges	long-term resilience
	Developing patience and dedication	patience and dedication
	Learning to love the profession	professional appreciation

Collaboration as a Source of Professional Support. Collegial support helps multigrade teachers reduce professional isolation and manage classroom and school-related demands. Participants expressed this through “my colleagues, my co-teachers help me” (P2, L683), “collaboration of teachers is needed” (P3, L686), and “We help each other in school” (P12, L689). Naparan and Alinsug (2021) emphasized flexible and collaborative strategies in multigrade instruction, Hiew and Hamid (2023) highlighted shared planning in combined-class settings, and Chainey and Cassity (2021) showed that peer learning and mentoring strengthen teacher confidence.

School Leadership and Technical Assistance Support Teaching. School leadership supports teachers through feedback, coaching, and lesson-planning guidance. Participants described support through “regular monitoring and feedback” (P7, L838), “classroom observation and coaching” (P8, L840–841), and “crafting the MG Lesson Plan” (P12, L845). Hiew and Hamid (2023) emphasized the role of headteacher leadership in scheduling and planning, SEAMEO INNOTECH (2021) highlighted school-based technical assistance for multigrade teachers, and Tayoni and Abocejo (2023) noted the need for stronger monitoring and support in the Multigrade Education Program.

Community and Stakeholder Support Motivates Teachers and Learners. External and community support encourages learners, eases teacher challenges, and strengthens school activities. Participants noted that NGO support can “boost motivation to learners” (P5, L767), stakeholder presence “helps me overcome the challenges” (P4, L768), and parents “volunteered in School ‘Pahina’” (P18, L734). UNICEF Myanmar (2024) emphasized community-based support for learning continuity, the World Bank (2023) linked rural education continuity with local support systems, and Tayoni and Abocejo (2023) noted that stakeholder participation supports multigrade

implementation.

Resourcefulness and Creativity in Teaching. Teachers’ ability to adapt lessons, localize activities, and combine grade-level instruction despite limited resources. Participants described becoming “resourceful and creative” (P4, L826), learning to “localize the activities” (P18, L823), and choosing to “combine lessons across the grade levels” (P9, L815–816). Pranata and Syamsijulianto (2024) emphasized lesson adaptation in multilevel settings, Hestiana (2022) showed the value of linking lessons to real-life contexts, and Takdir (2021) noted that teachers adjust instruction in remote multigrade classrooms.

Fulfillment, Patience, and Love for Multigrade Teaching. Teachers sustain multigrade work through resilience, patience, dedication, and personal meaning. Participants shared that multigrade teaching is “challenging but we can overcome it” (P1, L897), that they “learned to be patient” (P7, L898), and that they “learned to love my job” (P16, L907). Ratanasiripong *et al.* (2021) emphasized the importance of teacher well-being in managing stress and burnout, Hongsa and Polyong (2024) linked teacher workload with stress and burnout risks, and the Equitable Education Fund (2025) highlighted teachers’ persistence in remote multigrade contexts.

Systemic Challenges Encountered by Multigrade Teachers in Bayugan City

The analysis examined the systemic challenges encountered by multigrade teachers in Bayugan City as they implemented curriculum, managed instructional responsibilities, and sustained teaching under structural constraints. Table 4 shows that these challenges were reflected in curriculum and policy misalignment, insufficient instructional resources, administrative workload and support gaps, heavy instructional demands, policy implementation pressures, and compensation and funding concerns.

Table 4: Themes and Sub-Themes on the Systemic Challenges Encountered by Multigrade Teachers of Bayugan City

Themes	Sub-Themes	Core Ideas
Curriculum and Policy Misalignment	Adjusting to frequent curriculum changes	frequent curriculum adjustment
	Navigating policies designed for monograde classes	monograde-oriented policies
	Managing unrealistic pacing and time allotment	insufficient instructional time
Insufficient Instructional Resources	Lacking multigrade textbooks and learning materials	lack of multigrade materials
	Needing multigrade-specific lesson formats	absence of multigrade lesson formats
	Creating instructional materials independently	teacher-made resources
Administrative Workload and Support Gaps	Handling multiple tasks and coordinators	multiple coordinators
	Managing overlapping duties and school activities	overlapping duties
	Receiving limited training and professional support	limited training support
Heavy Instructional Demands	Teaching multiple subjects and grade levels	multiple subjects and grades
	Addressing diverse competencies across grade levels	varied grade-level competencies
	Experiencing stress and workload strain	workload-related stress
Policy Implementation Pressures	Practicing mass promotion despite learner unreadiness	promotion despite unreadiness
	Reporting transmuted rather than actual grades	grade transmutation concerns
	Limiting teacher discipline under policy constraints	restricted discipline authority
Compensation and Funding Concerns	Losing or not receiving multigrade allowance	unpaid multigrade allowance
	Receiving insufficient or unsuitable resources	unsuitable resource provision
	Facing infrastructure limitations linked to system support	inadequate school facilities

Curriculum and Policy Misalignment. Multigrade teachers experience difficulty when curriculum expectations, policy design, and time allotment do not fully match multilevel classroom realities. Participants described this through “Changing Curriculum hinders in managing the classroom effectively” (P1, lines 86–88), “The policy is confusing... patterned to monograde” (P10, lines 95–97), and “45 mins... hindrance to me since I handle MG class” (P15, lines 101–102). Daga (2021) identified lesson planning, assessment, monitoring, and reporting as recurring multigrade concerns, Raihani and Sari (2022) emphasized the need for coherent policy implementation, and Naparan and Alinsug (2021) showed that flexible classroom strategies help teachers respond to policy-classroom gaps.

Insufficient Instructional Resources. Limited multigrade materials and lesson formats increase teachers’ preparation burden and reduce instructional efficiency. Participants noted “No books and MG Learning resource designed for MG” (P10, lines 95–97), “No available

MG Daily Lesson Log” (P11, lines 164–165), and “MG teachers need to look and prepare” (P8, lines 158–159). Bagay (2025) found that limited resources affect multigrade teachers’ response to diverse learner needs, Naparan and Castañeda (2021) documented resource-related challenges in multigrade settings, and Hiew and Hamid (2023) emphasized that school-level organization and shared planning help support combined-class implementation.

Administrative Workload and Support Gaps. Coordinators, overlapping duties, and limited training interfere with teachers’ focus on instruction. Participants described having “triple or more coordinators... exhausting” (P5, lines 115–117), “Overlapping of events... do not know what to do first” (P1, lines 111–112), and “No training... during deployment” (P16, lines 195–197). DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 supports the removal of administrative tasks from teachers, SEAMEO INNOTECH (2021) emphasized school-based learning action support for multigrade teachers, and Chainey and

Cassity (2021) showed that mentoring and observation-feedback cycles strengthen teacher confidence and practice.

Heavy Instructional Demands. Multigrade teachers experience strain from handling several subjects, grade levels, and competencies within one classroom. Participants expressed this through “Few learners but more subjects” (P3, lines 186–187), “Different competencies per grade level” (P14, lines 205–206), and “Increases my workload... makes me stressed” (P1, lines 453–455). Tahir *et al.* (2025) found that time constraints affect instructional coherence across grade levels, Yusoff *et al.* (2025) showed that workload and limited preparation time constrain differentiated instruction, and Naparan and Alinsug (2021) emphasized flexible strategies for managing multigrade classroom demands.

Policy Implementation Pressures. Standardized promotion, grading, and discipline policies can create tension between compliance and classroom realities. Participants reported “We promote all the learners” (P18, lines 321–324), “Real grades not being reported” (P16, lines 436–437), and “Limited rights to discipline” (P13, lines 335–336). Tayoni and Abocejo (2023) reported implementation weaknesses in training, resources, and monitoring. Naparan and Castañeda (2021) noted that accountability pressures add to multigrade teachers’ stress, and Yusoff

et al. (2025) emphasized that policy expectations must be supported by professional development, resources, and collaborative learning communities.

Compensation and Funding Concerns. Unpaid allowances, unsuitable resources, and inadequate facilities affect teacher motivation and classroom conditions. Participants described concerns such as “MG Allowance... we did not receive it” (P5, lines 90–92), “Items not suited to learners’ needs” (P11, lines 304–305), and “We lack buildings” (P14, lines 302–303). Republic Act No. 11997 institutionalizes teaching allowance support for public school teachers, DepEd Order No. 005, s. 2025 provides guidelines on the grant of teaching allowance, and DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2023 supports facilities funding through the Basic Education Facilities Fund.

External Challenges Encountered by Multigrade Teachers in Bayugan City

The analysis examined the external challenges encountered by multigrade teachers in Bayugan City as they navigated classroom instruction within difficult learner, home, community, environmental, and access-related conditions. Table 5 shows that these challenges were reflected in socio-economic hardship, home and parental support limitations, community and stakeholder gaps, infrastructure and environmental challenges, learner readiness and performance barriers.

Table 5: Themes and Sub-Themes on the External Challenges Encountered by Multigrade Teachers of Bayugan City

Themes	Sub-Themes	Core Ideas
Socio-economic Hardship of Learners	Coming to school hungry and economically deprived	hunger and deprivation
	Engaging in child labor and livelihood activities	livelihood-related responsibilities
	Experiencing absenteeism due to family circumstances	poverty-related absenteeism
Home and Parental Support Limitations	Lacking academic follow-up at home	limited home follow-up
	Showing limited parental participation	weak parental involvement
	Managing parent attitudes and school-related issues	parent-teacher tension
Community and Stakeholder Gaps	Receiving weak barangay support	weak local support
	Receiving limited NGO support for teachers	limited teacher assistance
	Facing communication and access barriers	difficult community communication
Infrastructure and Environmental Challenges	Using inadequate school facilities	shared classroom spaces
	Teaching in unsafe or poor learning environments	unsafe school facilities
	Addressing language and IP-related barriers	language and cultural barriers
Learner Readiness and Performance Barriers	Supporting slow and struggling learners	slow learner support
	Accommodating learners with special needs	disability-related learning needs
	Managing learner behavior issues	bullying and behavior concerns

Geographic and Technological Limitations	Lacking household technology for communication	limited household technology
	Dealing with poor school accessibility	difficult school access
	Lacking learning resources at home	lack of basic learning materials

readiness and performance barriers, and geographic and technological limitations.

Socio-economic Hardship of Learners. Poverty-related conditions affect learners' readiness, attendance, and participation in multigrade classrooms. Participants described learners who "come to school hungry" (P9, lines 224–225), help "feed their family" (P2, lines 219–221), and "skipped going to school" (P11, lines 235–236). DepEd Order No. 031, s. 2021 supports school-based feeding to address learners' nutrition needs, while Ares-Ferreirós *et al.* (2025) emphasized that multigrade education is often shaped by structural barriers affecting rural and resource-limited learners.

Home and Parental Support Limitations. Limited home follow-up and weak parental participation increase teachers' responsibility for reinforcement and learner support. Participants noted that "parents cannot do follow up" (P1, lines 216–218), "not all parents show support" (P11, lines 264–265), and there are "issues between parents and teachers" (P10, lines 257–259). DepEd Memorandum No. 002, s. 2026 positions parents and guardians as co-educators, while Yusoff *et al.* (2025) emphasized that learner support improves when schools are supported by collaborative learning communities.

Community and Stakeholder Gaps. Weak barangay, NGO, and communication support limits the broader assistance available to multigrade teachers. Participants reported "no support from the brgy" (P11, lines 264–266), "no help for teachers" (P18, line 346), and reliance on "house to house announcement" (P13, lines 233–234). DepEd Memorandum No. 042, s. 2025 promotes stakeholder participation through Brigada Eskwela, while Ares-Ferreirós *et al.* (2025) highlighted the importance of local support in strengthening multigrade education.

Infrastructure and Environmental Challenges. Inadequate facilities, unsafe classrooms, and language barriers affect instruction and learner participation. Participants described a "shared classroom" (P2, lines 290–293), "old buildings... crumbling" (P12, line 312), and a "language barrier... Manobo dialect" (P16, lines 229–230). DepEd

Order No. 020, s. 2025 recognizes language-responsive instruction in early grades, while Wong and Hollingsworth (2021) emphasized that teacher training and community engagement are needed in contexts shaped by language diversity and classroom realities. Learner Readiness and Performance Barriers. Varied learner readiness, disability-related needs, and behavior concerns make multigrade instruction more complex. Participants mentioned that "there are really slow learners" (P12, lines 244–245), there are "learners with disability" (P14, lines 240–241), and "bullying is still present" (P15, lines 333–334). Republic Act No. 12028 supports learning interventions for struggling learners, Republic Act No. 11650 strengthens inclusive education services, and DepEd Memorandum No. 090, s. 2025 provides guidance on anti-bullying implementation.

Geographic and Technological Limitations. Poor access, weak technology availability, and lack of home learning materials disrupt communication and learning continuity. Participants described households with "no technology... no TV" (P13, lines 231–233), poor roads where the "way to school is not good" (P11, lines 265–266), and learners lacking "ballpens, bag" (P11, lines 339–341). DepEd Order No. 016, s. 2023 supports the DepEd Computerization Program, while DepEd's Digital Bayanihan initiative focuses on connectivity support for last-mile schools.

Gap Between National Education Policies and the Realities of Multigrade Classes

The analysis examined how multigrade teachers experience the gap between national education policies and actual multigrade classroom realities in Bayugan City. Table 6 shows that this gap was reflected in policy–practice misalignment, policy-driven workload pressure, compromised instructional integrity, limited teacher autonomy, instructional adjustments, reliance on teacher initiative and creativity, emotional and professional impact, and mismatch between assessment and actual learning.

Table 6: Themes and Sub-Themes on How Multigrade Teachers Experience the Gap Between National Education Policies and the Realities of Multigrade Classes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Core Ideas
Policy–Practice Misalignment	Navigating monograde-oriented policies in multigrade classrooms	monograde-oriented policy design
	Experiencing ideal expectations against complex classroom realities	ideal policy expectations
	Implementing standardized requirements across diverse learners	uniform assessment demands

Policy-Driven Pressure	Workload	Managing increased workload from multiple requirements	multiple policy requirements
		Coping with time constraints and pacing demands	pacing pressure
		Feeling stressed by unmet policy expectations	expectation-related stress
Compromised Instructional Integrity		Promoting learners despite unreadiness	promotion despite unreadiness
		Reporting transmuted or altered learner results	altered grade reporting
		Complying with unrealistic standards under pressure	compliance pressure
Limited Teacher Autonomy Due to Policies		Restricting discipline under child protection policies	restricted discipline authority
		Accommodating SNED learners within multigrade classes	inclusion without adequate support
		Following standardized testing and reporting constraints	standardized testing constraints
Instructional Adjustments to Bridge the Gap		Combining lessons across grade levels	combined grade-level lessons
		Using peer and group-based strategies	peer and group teaching
		Localizing and contextualizing instruction	localized instruction
Reliance on Teacher Initiative and Creativity		Creating materials and strategies independently	teacher-made strategies
		Solving instructional problems independently	independent problem-solving
		Adapting teaching strategies to classroom realities	simplified and prioritized lessons
Emotional and Professional Impact		Experiencing stress, fatigue, and burnout	stress and burnout
		Feeling pressure and reduced professional confidence	reduced professional confidence
		Sustaining responsibility despite constraints	persistent responsibility
Mismatch Between Assessment and Actual Learning		Promoting learners despite lack of mastery	promotion without mastery
		Reporting grades that do not reflect actual performance	inaccurate grade representation
		Conducting assessments across multiple learner levels	multilevel assessment difficulty

Policy-Practice Misalignment. Multigrade teachers experience difficulty when national policies are designed for monograde classrooms but are applied to multilevel teaching realities. Participants expressed this through “designed in a monograde class” (P1, lines 397–399), “expectations are very ideal” (P6, lines 401–403), and “three different grade levels... plus SNED learners” (P14, lines 423–424). Tayoni and Abocejo (2023) noted weaknesses in training, resources, facilities, and monitoring, Raihani and Sari (2022) emphasized coherent policy execution and support, and Hiew and Hamid (2023) showed that leadership, scheduling, and shared planning can make combined-class teaching more manageable.

Policy-Driven Workload Pressure. Policy requirements increase teachers’ workload through multiple lessons, assessments, reports, and pacing expectations. Participants described “multiple lessons and assessments” (P1, lines 453–455), “different grade levels... I need to keep track” (P5, lines 418–420), and “It makes me stressed” (P1, lines 454–

455). Daga (2021) identified lesson planning, assessment, monitoring, reporting, and learning management as recurring multigrade concerns, Tahir *et al.* (2025) found that time limits affect instructional coherence, and Chainey and Cassity (2021) showed that mentoring and curriculum-aligned resources help teachers manage instructional demands.

Compromised Instructional Integrity. Teachers experience ethical and professional tension when policy compliance conflicts with actual learner readiness and performance. Participants reported “promote all the learners” (P18, lines 321–324), “Transmutation... automatically adjusts the scores” (P2, lines 316–319), and “We just follow orders” (P18, lines 323–325). Naparan and Castañeda (2021) found that multigrade teachers face accountability pressures, Daga (2021) identified assessment and reporting as major concerns, and Yusoff *et al.* (2025) emphasized that differentiated pedagogy requires support through resources, professional development, and collaboration.

Limited Teacher Autonomy Due to Policies. Policies on learner protection, inclusion, testing, and reporting can limit teachers' classroom-level judgment when support systems are insufficient. Participants noted "limited rights to discipline" (P13, lines 335–336), "mandated to accept learners with special needs" (P6, lines 307–308), and "Unified tests do not align with reality" (P18, lines 406–407). Wong and Hollingsworth (2021) emphasized targeted teacher training and community engagement, Yusoff *et al.* (2025) highlighted professional development and resources for differentiated pedagogy, and Chainey and Cassity (2021) showed that mentoring and observation-feedback cycles strengthen teacher confidence.

Instructional Adjustments to Bridge the Gap. Teachers bridge policy and classroom realities by adjusting lessons, grouping learners, and localizing instruction. Participants shared "I combine lessons across the grade levels" (P9, lines 439–440), "I use group or peer teaching activities" (P8, lines 440–441), and "I localize the activities" (P18, lines 445–446). Naparan and Alinsug (2021) found that flexible grouping and peer tutoring support multigrade instruction, Hiew and Hamid (2023) emphasized scheduling and shared planning, and Yusoff *et al.* (2025) showed that differentiated pedagogy helps respond to mixed-grade learner needs.

Reliance on Teacher Initiative and Creativity. Teachers personally compensate for policy, material, and instructional gaps through independent problem-solving and adaptive strategies. Participants described "teacher's initiative... adjust time and competencies" (P12, lines 443–444), "strategizing is needed" (P13, lines 458–459), and "Simplify lessons and prioritize" (P3, lines 441–442). Bagay (2025) found that multigrade teachers use adaptive strategies to address complex classroom realities, Naparan and Alinsug (2021) documented flexible classroom strategies, and Daga (2021) identified resource preparation

and learning management as persistent teacher concerns. *Emotional and Professional Impact.* Policy–reality gap affects teachers emotionally and professionally through stress, fatigue, reduced confidence, and continued responsibility. Participants stated that they were "emotionally, mentally and physically affected" (P16, lines 195–197), that the situation "affects my confidence as a teacher" (P5, lines 456–458), and that "We still do our best" (P15, lines 615–616). Tahir *et al.* (2025) noted instructional pressure in rural multigrade classrooms, Hongsa and Polyong (2024) linked teaching conditions with stress and burnout risks, and Ratanasiripong *et al.* (2021) emphasized the importance of teacher well-being support.

Mismatch Between Assessment and Actual Learning. Standardized assessment and reporting systems may not fully capture learners' varied mastery, readiness, and progress in multigrade classrooms. Participants observed that learners are "promoted even if not grade ready" (P12, lines 341–342), that "Real grades [are] not being reported" (P16, lines 436–437), and that assessment is difficult across "multiple grade levels" (P7, lines 420–421). Daga (2021) identified assessment, monitoring, and reporting as recurring concerns, Tayoni and Abocejo (2023) noted implementation gaps in the Multigrade Education Program, and Yusoff *et al.* (2025) emphasized the need for differentiated support when learners vary in readiness and performance.

Support Systems Necessary to Address the Challenges of Multigrade Teachers

The analysis examined the support systems necessary to address the challenges of multigrade teachers in Bayugan City. Table 7 shows that the needed support systems were reflected in instructional resource support, professional development and training support, technical assistance and supervisory support, collaborative support systems, administrative and workload support, financial and

Table 7: Themes and Sub-Themes on the Support Systems Necessary to Address the Challenges of Multigrade Teachers

Themes	Sub-Themes	Core Ideas
Instructional Resource Support	Developing MG-designed lesson plans and Daily Lesson Logs	multigrade lesson guides
	Providing MG textbooks, workbooks, and learning materials	multigrade learning materials
	Utilizing PowerPoint presentations and teaching aids for MG	multigrade teaching aids
Professional Development and Training Support	Participating in regular and enhanced MG trainings	regular multigrade training
	Aligning training with actual MG classroom needs	needs-based training
	Engaging in regular LAC sessions and mentoring	school-based mentoring
Technical Assistance and Supervisory Support	Receiving technical assistance from school heads	school head coaching
	Accessing technical assistance from supervisors and EPS	supervisor support
	Receiving coaching, monitoring, and positive reinforcement	constructive feedback

Collaborative Support System	Strengthening collaboration among teachers	teacher collaboration
	Participating in regular sharing and mentoring practices	peer sharing
	Building school-based team support systems	team-based support
Administrative and Workload Support	Reducing administrative workload demands	reduced paperwork
	Allocating dedicated time for lesson planning	protected planning time
	Ensuring fair workload distribution and task management	fair task distribution
Financial and Material Support	Ensuring proper utilization of school funds	direct fund use
	Providing materials without burdening teachers financially	teacher expense reduction
	Strengthening salary and allowance support	allowance support
Community and Parent Support	Supporting learners through parental follow-up	home learning support
	Encouraging community participation in school activities	community participation
	Strengthening barangay and local leadership support	local leadership support

material support, and community and parent support.

Instructional Resource Support. Teachers need ready-to-use and context-appropriate materials to reduce preparation burden and support multilevel instruction. Participants expressed the need for “Daily Lesson logs... designed for MG” (P11, lines 535–536), “MG text books” (P17, lines 532–533), and materials usable “during the delivery of the lesson” (P18, lines 585–586). Bagay (2025) highlighted the need for adaptive resources in multigrade teaching. Yacub and Pallada (2023) noted that shortages in learning materials increase teachers’ workload, and Ares-Ferreirós *et al.* (2025) emphasized that resource availability is central to effective multigrade practice.

Professional Development and Training Support. Multigrade teachers need sustained and needs-based training aligned with actual classroom realities. Participants referred to “training being provided... by the Division” (P2, line 525), trainings “suited to our needs” (P18, lines 534–535), and LAC sessions that are helpful when “done regularly in school” (P7, lines 541–542). Tahir *et al.* (2025) emphasized targeted training for rural multigrade teachers, Chainey and Cassity (2021) showed that mentoring and feedback strengthen teacher practice, and SEAMEO INNOTECH (2021) provided LAC materials to support multigrade teacher competence.

Technical Assistance and Supervisory Support. Teachers need instructional guidance from school heads, supervisors, and education program supervisors to strengthen confidence and classroom practice. Participants described “technical assistance in classroom observation and coaching” (P8, lines 489–491), support from the “EPS or Education Program Supervisor” (P17, line 553), and “regular monitoring and feedback” (P7, lines 485–486). Hiew and Hamid (2023) emphasized the role of leadership and supervision in combined-class teaching. Wong and Hollingsworth (2021) highlighted coaching and monitoring as supports for instructional improvement,

and Pranoto *et al.* (2021) showed that teacher learning centers provide continuing professional support.

Collaborative Support System. Teacher collaboration reduces isolation and supports shared problem-solving in multigrade settings. Participants emphasized “teacher collaboration” (P11, line 535), “regular sharing sessions with co-workers” (P6, lines 543–544), and the practice of helping “each other in school” (P12, line 139). Chainey and Cassity (2021) found that peer learning groups strengthen teacher confidence, Yusoff *et al.* (2025) highlighted collaborative learning communities for differentiated pedagogy, and Hiew and Hamid (2023) emphasized shared planning in combined-class arrangements.

Administrative and Workload Support. Reducing administrative duties, protecting planning time, and distributing tasks fairly are necessary for sustaining multigrade teaching. Participants noted that “reduction of administrative workloads is really helpful” (P2, lines 579–581), identified the need for “time for planning” (P17, lines 587–588), and described workload arrangement with an “equal share” (P16, lines 461–463). DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 supports the removal of administrative tasks from teachers, Tahir *et al.* (2025) found that time constraints affect multigrade instruction, and Yusoff *et al.* (2025) emphasized that differentiated pedagogy requires adequate preparation and support.

Financial and Material Support. Teachers need adequate funding, materials, and allowance support to prevent personal financial burden and sustain classroom needs. Participants stated that “the budget must be used directly” (P17, lines 531–532), that there should be “no need for the MG teacher to provide using her own money” (P12, lines 591–592), and that it would help if the “MG allowance” were restored (P10, lines 614–615). Republic Act No. 11997 institutionalizes teaching allowance support, DepEd Order No. 005, s. 2025 provides additional guidelines for teaching allowance grants, and

Ares-Ferreirós *et al.* (2025) emphasized that resource and structural support are important in multigrade education. *Community and Parent Support*. Multigrade teaching requires support from parents, barangay leaders, and the wider community to strengthen learner follow-up and school participation. Participants emphasized that learners need “assistance at home also” (P12, lines 431–433), that parents “participate in Pahina” and attend meetings (P14, lines 267–268), and that teachers need “support from the community” (P13, lines 538–539). SEAMEO INNOTECH (2021) emphasized support mechanisms for multigrade teachers, UNICEF Myanmar (2024) highlighted community-based support in difficult learning contexts, and the World Bank (2023) emphasized the importance of local support in sustaining education continuity.

CONCLUSION

Multigrade education remains a necessary instructional arrangement in Southeast Asia and Bayugan City, especially in communities affected by geography, low enrolment, limited resources, and diverse learner needs. Its effectiveness depends on flexible, contextualized, and learner-responsive teaching practices supported by adequate institutional and community mechanisms. The realities of multigrade teachers in Bayugan City show that resilience, collaboration, and commitment sustain classroom delivery, but these are often challenged by policy gaps, workload demands, resource limitations, and insufficient support. Thus, multigrade education should not be treated as a simple classroom assignment but as a complex professional practice requiring coordinated support in curriculum, assessment, workload management, professional development, technical assistance, financing, and community participation. While Southeast Asian literature presents multigrade education as a broader strategy for improving educational access, the Bayugan City findings highlight its localized realities and the need for context-specific support for teachers and learners.

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