



LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MULTIGRADE TEACHERS IN MOUNTAINOUS SCHOOLS: BASIS FOR INTERVENTION PROGRAM (IP)

MICHELLE MITCH C. MIGUEL
TEACHER I

Igmedio Drapiza Ip Elementary School
miguelmichellemitch@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in mountainous schools as a basis for an intervention plan in the 1st Congressional District of Iloilo during the School Year 2025–2026. Using a phenomenological research design under the qualitative method, the study involved ten (10) selected multigrade teachers assigned to mountainous schools. In-depth interviews were used to gather the needed data.

The results of the study revealed that the experiences of multigrade teachers assigned to mountainous schools included strong dedication, limited transportation access, and a deep sense of fulfillment. On the other hand, the challenges they encountered included limited instructional resources, poor road infrastructure, and difficulties in time management. To cope with these challenges, the multigrade teachers employed strategies such as building positive relationships, using new teaching strategies, and maximizing available resources. The findings of the study then served as the basis for the proposed intervention plan.

Keywords: *Experiences, Multi-grade Teachers, Mountainous Schools, Intervention Plan*

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INTRODUCTION

A learning experience is an individual journey that includes everything you do, think, and feel from the start of the experience until its completion, and often extends beyond that point. Multi-grade teachers provide the opportunity to explore new strategies and develop important life skills on indigenous learners that will also serve their community well in the future.

A multigrade teacher instructs students from two or more grade levels simultaneously in a single classroom. Common in remote areas with low enrollment, acting as a facilitator, designer, community liaison officer, and social worker (Lisonda, 2023).

A teacher noble duty extends beyond the classroom in which she teaches. It goes further than that, even if she is not in traditional classroom or a different one than the others, she is still teaching because molding and enhancing one mind is her calling. The same is true for multigrade education, in which students from multiple grade levels and grouped in a single classroom under the supervision of a single teacher (Tayoni & Abocejo, 2023).

On the other hand, a multigrade teacher assigned in mountainous schools are dedicated educators in remote areas, facing challenges like language barriers and limited resources, but employing creative strategies like contextualizing lessons using local dialects for understanding, and leveraging peer teaching to succeed (DO 81, s. 2009).

Furthermore, the multigrade teaching scenario in Indigenous and mountainous schools illustrate numerous aspects regarding learning and teaching. It has been utilized in many nations around the world to provide comprehensive basic education to children, particularly

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in rural areas of developing countries. Geographical abnormalities, social and economic quirks, and a lack of suitable educational infrastructure and personnel are some of the reasons cited. Due to the exact circumstances of teacher scarcity and relatively small student numbers, this approach is particularly applicable in rural locations (Literal & Sabud, 2025).

It was understandable that many parents prioritized sending their children to school. They wanted to prevent their children from facing the same disadvantages they had experienced; such as being taken advantage of by others due to illiteracy or lack of basic numeracy skills. However, education also brought new needs, aspirations, and perspectives; for instance, certain personal ambitions emerged in children. To address this challenge and respect the worldviews of indigenous communities, incorporating local knowledge into education to enhance learning quality was considered essential (Hellsten & Prytula, 2021).

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in mountainous schools, who often faced challenges such as managing classrooms and time effectively, addressing learner diversity, coping with insufficient training for multigrade teaching, and experiencing burnout. It was within these gaps that this research was carefully undertaken.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research method, research design, respondents of the study, data-gathering procedure, research instruments, and data analyses to be used in this study.

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Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews. According to Boyce and Neale (2020), an in-depth interview is a qualitative technique that involves interviewing a small number of participants to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, process, or situation.

They further explained that qualitative research was effective for obtaining specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, experiences, and social contexts of particular populations, while in-depth interviews allowed the collection of detailed information beyond initial or surface-level responses. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews while strictly adhering to health protocols, aiming to gather participants' perspectives and experiences through their thorough and vivid responses.

Research Design

The study adopted a phenomenological approach within the qualitative method. Phenomenology focuses on the shared meanings experienced by participants to gain an understanding of their lived experiences (Creswell, as cited by Merriam, 2020). It examines experiences as they are lived and structured through consciousness.

In this study, the researcher identified the phenomenon under investigation as the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in mountainous elementary schools. By examining the common experiences of the participants, the study sought to achieve a deeper understanding that could inform valuable psycho-social interventions (Smith, 2023).

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Participants of the study

The participants of the study were ten (10) selected multigrade teachers who taught in mountainous schools in the 1st Congressional District of Iloilo during the school year 2025–2026.

Given these inclusion criteria, they were considered suitable subjects for this study. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgment, selective, or subjective sampling, was used to identify the participants. This sampling technique relies on the researcher’s judgment in selecting members of the population to participate in the study (Creswell, as cited by Golzar, 2025).

Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study was an interview guide developed by the researcher. A panel of experts reviewed and validated the guide, and all feedback and suggestions provided during the validation process were carefully considered.

Zoom, messenger and other accessible platforms were also used to conduct the in-depth interviews.

Voice and video recorders were utilized to document all activities and discussions during the in-depth interviews.

Validity of the Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a researcher-developed interview guide, which was validated by expert jurors using the Eight-Point Scale Criteria for Content Validation by Good and Scates (as cited by Oducado, 2020).

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The panel of experts in the field of research reviewed the instrument to ensure its content validity, which refers to the extent to which a measure adequately represents all aspects of the construct being studied. Since the instrument was created by the researcher, jury validation was conducted to establish its validity (Nickerson, 2023).

Data Gathering Procedures

After identifying the participants, the researcher obtained their voluntary participation, documented through signed consent forms.

The researcher first handpicked multigrade teachers who met the qualifications for the interview. Each selected teacher received a letter containing their profile and a consent form, granting permission for video recording during the interview.

Once the participants' written consent was obtained, interviews were conducted at times convenient for each participant, either face-to-face or via Facebook Messenger. The interview process included three types: open-ended, semi-structured, and structured interviews, all focused on the study's central questions.

Initially, in-depth interviews were conducted to capture the participants' perspectives regarding the study. The entire interview sessions were recorded to ensure all responses were fully documented.

After completing the interviews, the researcher consolidated the collected data and analyzed it using a thematic approach. The video recordings were transcribed, and both the original and translated transcripts were categorized into meaning units and subjected to thematic analysis.

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Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using a thematic approach.

This qualitative analysis technique was employed to identify the themes emerging from the experiences of multigrade teachers, which served as a basis for developing an intervention plan in the 1st Congressional District of Iloilo.

Thematic analysis involves identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2020), the goal of thematic analysis is to pinpoint patterns in the data that are significant or insightful and use these findings to address the research questions or highlight relevant issues. This process included summarizing, analyzing, interpreting, and making sense of the collected data.

Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2023) outlined six phases of thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing the report.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the descriptive-qualitative analyses of multigrade teachers lived experiences in mountainous schools in the 1st Congressional District of Iloilo during the school year 2025-2026.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in mountainous elementary schools?

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2. What are the challenges encountered by multigrade teachers in mountainous elementary schools?
3. How do multigrade teachers cope with the challenges they encounter as multigrade teachers in mountainous schools?
4. What intervention plan can be proposed based on the results of the study?

Lived Experiences of Multigrade Teachers in Mountainous Schools

The experiences of multigrade teachers assigned in mountainous schools are dedicated educators in remote areas, facing challenges like language barriers and limited resources, but employing creative strategies like contextualizing lessons using local dialects for understanding, and leveraging peer teaching to succeed (DO 81, s. 2009).

Based on the results of the study, the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in mountainous schools were strong dedication, limited transportation access, and deep sense of fulfillment.

Strong Dedication

Strong dedication in education represents an unwavering commitment to learning and teaching, acting as a critical driver for academic excellence, student achievement, and personal growth (Sunguti, 2026).

According to Participant 1 said that one of her experiences as multigrade teacher in mountainous school was strong dedication to service.

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Participant 2 added, "My lived experiences are challenging. Teaching in remote area requires strong dedication because of long and difficult travel. However, what pushes me to continue teaching is because of my strong commitment and dedication to service."

This infers that teachers in mountainous schools show every day ready to make a difference, even when the challenges are tough. They are deeply invested in the success of their learners, often sacrificing personal time just to offer extra help.

In multigrade schools, pupils of various ages and skill levels share a classroom with a single teacher. They can be organized in some ways, from a single instructor overseeing multiple formal grade divisions to an entirely ungraded learning environment. Unlike traditional schools, where each class is usually composed of a different grade with its instructor and classroom, multi-grade schools do not follow this pattern (Murphy, 2021).

Limited Transportation Access

Multigrade teachers is inspiring learners to instruct and mentor them through their course materials, they need to travel in a long distance to be ready to recognize the variances between their learners. No matter what subject is being covered in the classroom, the teacher needs to come in school on time, however they failed to do so because of their difficulties to transport (Dela Cruz, 2022).

According to Participant 5, "As a teacher handling multigrade classes is very challenging. I prepare multiple lesson plans in a day and manage varied learning abilities at the same time. Also, I used to walk an hour just to reach the school on time."

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Participant 6 added, "Every morning, starts before dawn I walk a long winding trail. Sometimes muddy and sometimes rocky. There are times that I have to cross the rivers across barefooted just to reach the school."

Participant 7 also added, "Teaching in mountainous schools has never been easy for me, I walked a long distance every day."

Participant 8 further said, "I walk in a long distance every day."

Moreover, Participant 9 said, "I used to wake up early in the morning in order for me to reach the school before the time schedule. I walk in a long-distance pace and sometimes I ride in a motorcycle."

This infers that multigrade teachers in mountainous schools serve as facilitators which can improve social skills and responsibility. The opportunities experienced by multigrade teachers enhance self-esteem, recognizing their dedication in spite of difficulties in transportation.

When formal schooling began, children in mountain schools continued to be exposed to their culture, with this experience further enhanced by structured lessons on the history and traditions of their community (Marble & Ferguson, 2020).

Deep Sense of Fulfillment

In Department of Education, multigrade teachers in mountainous schools were commissioned to teach as reading teacher that contribute their expertise and valuable outputs in providing meaningful and fulfilling learning experiences among multigrade teachers (Cruz & Espina, 2022).

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According to Participant 3, "One of the experiences I encountered was its very challenging to be assigned in a mountainous school. It is sometimes fulfilling because I also love to teach children."

Participant 4 added, "As a teacher assigned in mountainous school and teaching multigrade classes is both challenging but fulfilling."

Participant 10 also added, "Although it is a longtime travel but it is fulfilling on my part as multigrade teachers with little kids under my care."

This infers that multigrade teachers assigned in mountainous schools connect to a higher purpose as helping others contributing to the improvement of learners learning skills and making its personal impact with personal relevance.

Fulfilling often found in overcoming the pain and hardship of a difficult, worthwhile goal. Sometimes it requires creative problem-solving involving integrating workout plans and challenges showcasing innovative engagement strategies (Sicat, 2024).

Challenges of Multigrade Teachers in Mountainous Schools

The successful multigrade teachers of the Department of Education is largely dependent on teachers' ability and willingness to support their children's learning; however, many multigrade teachers encounter hindering factors that often find it difficult to support their children's need in mountainous schools. Multigrade teachers reported that the new curriculum adds to their regular teaching load, often without compensation requiring them to create their own materials and manage inconsistent learners' attendance (Roefs, 2021).

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Based on the results of the study, the challenges encountered by multigrade teachers in mountainous schools were limited instructional resources, poor road infrastructure, and time management.

Limited Instructional Resources

Spencer & Wagner (2022), teachers frequently encounter lack of instructional materials, forcing them to create or produce their own resources. Without tailored resources, such as assistive technology or specialized often face increased barriers to learning. Limited instructional resources does not just make teaching harder. It can also affect the quality of education learners receive and increase the pressure on staff.

According to Participant 1, "There was limited learning resources in mountainous schools where I was assigned."

Participant 8 added, "There were limited learning resources and limited access to health and safety services."

Participant 9 also said, "There were limited materials. Classes were always suspended due to floods especially during weather interruptions."

Participant 10 stated that if learning was limited, teaching could not be considered effective.

This infers that a lack of learning materials severely impacts education by reducing learners engagement, causing lower academic performance, and creating significant teacher instruction on the implementation of MATATAG curriculum.

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Despite facing challenges, public elementary school teachers adjusted by designing straightforward yet engaging activities, working collaboratively with co-teachers, and utilizing online resources to enhance instructional materials. Some employed various strategies, such as preparing materials ahead of time or incorporating ARAL activities into regular lessons. To manage emotional stress, they sought encouragement from colleagues and celebrated small achievements with their students (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022).

Poor Road Infrastructure

Poor road infrastructure is a major, yet often overlooked, barrier to consistent, high-quality education. Constant travel on gravel or dirt causes extreme wear and tear on school buses such as broken mirrors, damaged suspension, and higher maintenance costs. Teachers for hours often have to walk for hours or travel long distances, leading to fatigue before the school day even begins (Gamao, 2022).

According to Participant 3, "The challenges I encountered was poor road infrastructure. It is difficult to reach on time in your if the road was muddy and dusty."

Participant 4 said, "One of the major challenges is accessibility during bad weather, roads become slippery and dangerous, making it difficult to travel."

Further, Participant 6 added, "It is difficult and dangerous to travel where you have to cross rivers passing along with hanging bridge and walk for 30 minutes."

This infers that rough roads or poor road infrastructure significantly hinder access to education, causing long dangerous commutes, and high transportation costs particularly during bad weather.

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The rural schools are the heart of the community and everything revolves around that school. But schools' choice funds don't have to go to rural schools. It has faith in the strategy's ability to connect isolated and marginalized communities with education. Thus, during the past few decades, the number and structure of multi-grade schools in the Philippines have expanded (Novelty Journal, 2022).

Time Management

Ineffective time management in teaching at mountainous schools provided insights into the experiences and roles of multigrade teachers. It allowed learners to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter, while enabling multigrade teachers to provide more accurate information regarding the challenges, difficulties, and effective teaching practices in these schools (Rechie & Ponte, 2021).

According to Participant 3, "Sometimes it is very hard to manage your time. For 5 years in the service, I am always late in going to school because of the distance of my house to the school where I was assigned will takes you 30 minutes."

Participant 5 supported the experience shared by her fellow teacher, stating that the distance between the school and her home hindered her travel time.

This infers that schools are vital for ensuring indigenous children receive an education that validates their identity, preserves their culture, and prepares them for life in their communities and beyond. However, multigrade teachers take more time to indicate those activities that requires a longer duration than initially expected due to unavailability of transportation. Multigrade Curriculum is designed to the learners' learning through targeted

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tutoring and remediation. However, its current implementation of the program reveals systemic gaps that burden multigrade teachers, strain resources, and limited time (Ballesteros, 2026).

Coping Strategies of Multigrade Teachers in Mountainous Schools

Mountainous, rural, or far-flung teachers employ a mix of resilience-based social, and professional strategies to navigate challenges. The child continues to receive this exposure in school and at home. The education they received is the way that most schoolchildren are taught national, state, provincial, or local history and social studies (Marble & Ferguson, 2020).

Based on the results of the study, the coping strategies employed by multigrade teachers in mountainous schools were positive relationship, use of new teaching strategies, and maximize availability of resources.

Building Positive Relationship

Healthy relationships in the workplace are essential for achieving career success. Developing strong professional connections often leads to higher productivity and greater job satisfaction. Lasting workplace relationships can be built by improving emotional intelligence and actively engaging with coworkers to understand them better (Herrity, 2025).

According to Participant 1 said, "In this world nothing is impossible. Be positive and creative always." Participant 6 added, "To cope these challenges, I build strong relationship with the community that becomes my support system."

Participant 8 also added, "In order to cope with the challenges, I make friends with my community in school to develop good relationship with them."

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This suggests that multigrade teachers in mountainous schools should view challenges as opportunities for growth and maintain a positive outlook.

According to Australia (2024), establishing effective relationships with other professionals and community members can make day-to-day experiences more meaningful and manageable. The same author also emphasized that recognizing the key elements of strong workplace relationships can help individuals assess their current connections and identify areas for improvement. Moreover, Australia (2024) noted that effective workplace relationships are characterized by trust and confidence in the reliability of coworkers and the people around them.

Using New Teaching Strategies

According to Murphy (2021), new teaching strategies refer to instructional approaches that teachers use to enhance students' academic performance. The study aimed to examine how extensively teachers implemented these innovative strategies, assess learners' satisfaction, and evaluate the learning experiences and outcomes resulting from their use.

According to Participant 2, "I practice proper planning and flexible teaching strategies such as differentiated instruction, and others."

Participant 4 added, "I prepare flexible lesson plans and use creative strategies such as peer teaching, group activities, and self-directed tasks so that while I teach one group, others remain engaged."

Meanwhile, Participant 10 said, "I become more resourceful. I am using new teaching strategies in teaching my IP learners, especially in English, math, and science."

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This infers that using new teaching strategies of multigrade teachers in mountainous schools shall move beyond lectures to keep indigenous learners engaged, such as using brainstorming, class discussions, and if possible the use of interactive technology-based activities.

Adopting new teaching strategies encourage multigrade teachers to explore topics to help learners solve real world problems and promoting deep learning. Becoming an effective teachers involve seeking out multiple sites of inputs that enable to reflect on and improve the teaching and learning that takes a place in the classroom (Ares, 2025).

Maximizing Available Resources

Fostering inclusion in the classroom involves offering diverse materials and activities that accommodate different learning styles, reflect multiple cultural backgrounds and perspectives, and encourage critical and courageous thinking (Rezel, 2025).

According to Participant 1, "I maximize available resources and create improvised instructional materials."

Participant 5 added, "I maximize available resources by creating improvised instructional materials."

This infers that promoting educational avenue of teaching and learning process requires providing a range of materials and activities that supports the classroom needs of non-teaching personnel by incorporating a variety of support instructional materials based on the subject load assigned to them.

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Hanford (2025) explained that classroom inclusion ensures that every child—regardless of race, religion, learning style, or ability—has equal access to educational opportunities within a safe and supportive environment, using learning materials that are accessible to all students.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the findings and insights of this study, the following recommendations are highlighted:

Multigrade teachers should continue to demonstrate dedication, adaptability, and creativity in addressing the challenges of teaching in mountainous schools. They should adopt new teaching strategies and integrate appropriate technologies, particularly in teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, to make learning more effective and meaningful for Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners.

Parents should extend their support to the school by encouraging their children to attend classes regularly and participate actively in school activities. They should also cooperate with teachers and other stakeholders in providing a supportive learning environment at home and in ensuring that children have access to adequate learning materials.

School heads should strengthen their support for multigrade teachers by ensuring proper monitoring, guidance, and encouragement in the implementation of programs for learners in mountainous schools. They should also promote collaboration among teachers,

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parents, and community stakeholders to address challenges related to transportation, resources, and instructional delivery.

The Department of Education (DepEd) shall ensure that multigrade teachers in mountainous schools are provided with additional compensation, adequate support, and clear implementation of programs for Indigenous Peoples. It shall also provide specialized and continuous training by promoting new teaching strategies and the integration of technology, particularly in the areas of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Parents and other stakeholders should be encouraged to extend assistance in ensuring the availability of adequate and high-quality reading materials to support remediation programs and other school-related activities.

Future researchers may conduct similar studies focusing on other factors affecting the experiences of multigrade teachers in mountainous schools, such as community involvement, learner achievement, cultural responsiveness, and policy implementation. They may also explore additional strategies and interventions that can further improve teaching and learning in multigrade settings.

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