

**Exploring the Experiences of Teachers Implementing Action Research in a Multi-Grade
Classroom for Physically Challenged Students**

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Abstract



A single teacher instructs a group of students with varying ages, grades, and skill levels simultaneously in a multi grade setting of special education institutions. The purpose of the study was to investigate the difficulties faced by teachers of multi grade classes. Action research project was conducted at one of Government Special Education institution and two teachers of physically challenged pupils with multigrade classes were purposefully sampled for this phenomenon, and a qualitative technique was chosen. Individual interviews with these two multi grade classroom teachers were used to gather data about the difficulties they encountered there, and focus group with teachers were held to discuss potential solutions for enhancing students' learning in multi grade settings were also conducted. Additionally, information was gathered via observing lessons. Audio recordings, transcriptions, and open coding were all used to interpret the interviews. The development of themes was the outcome of the synthesizing of data. The results demonstrate that teachers experienced difficulties such as multi grade teaching training, curriculum organization, work overload, classroom management, learner performance, lesson planning, teaching techniques, and assessment. The use of peer tutoring, flexible grouping and differentiated instructions appropriate to the developmental stage of various groups are all possible strategies.

Keywords: Multi grade teaching, Barriers, Potential solutions and Physical Challenged children, Action Research

Introduction

Multi grade teaching involves a single teacher instructing a group of learners who vary in age, grade, and skill level simultaneously explained by Ngubane, T. I. (2011). In contrast to mono-grade or single-grade teaching, where students in the same class are typically similar in age and ability, multi grade teaching is distinct. This approach recognizes the diverse needs and abilities of students and provides a unique opportunity for personalized learning (Shareefa, M. 2021). The findings clearly indicate that teachers are facing challenges when it comes to managing multi-grade classes. These difficulties may stem from inadequate training and unfavorable classroom conditions. Furthermore, teachers express a sense of isolation and a lack of recognition from the education department, as they are not provided with the necessary training. It is crucial for teachers to receive proper pedagogical training that specifically addresses the needs of multi-grade classrooms (Taole, M. J., 2014).

According to Kabuta, L. G. (2014), the notion of "physical disability" is broad and encompasses a variety of illnesses and disabilities, including both acquired and congenital conditions. Physically challenged individuals, also known as disabled individuals or physically handicapped individuals, have a physical impairment that significantly and permanently affects their capacity to carry out daily tasks. A person with a mild physical handicap would experience mobility issues, such as difficulty climbing stairs, and would require aids or assistance to walk. A person who has a significant physical handicap would be unable to walk and would need assistance getting around.

Significance of the study:

The study exploring the experiences of teachers implementing action research in a multi-grade classroom for physically challenged students holds significant value for both educational research and practice. Firstly, it sheds light on the unique challenges and opportunities that teachers encounter in a multi-grade classroom setting specifically in physically challenged students' classrooms. By examining the experiences of these teachers, the study provides valuable insights into effective instructional strategies and classroom management techniques that can enhance the learning outcomes and overall educational experiences of physically challenged students in multi-grade settings. Furthermore, the study contributes to the field of action research by highlighting the potential of this participatory research approach in addressing the specific needs and circumstances of physically challenged students in diverse educational contexts. The findings of this study can inform the development of inclusive educational policies, curriculum frameworks, and teacher training programs, ultimately fostering more inclusive and equitable learning environments for physically challenged students in multi-grade classrooms.

Background of the study

Multigrade teaching is a common practice around the world, and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's constitution declares that all children have the right to a fundamental education and that it is the duty of parents to see to it that they do. Although this right has many advantages, it also presents some challenges, such as the need for classroom space, teachers with the necessary skills, and funding to support the endeavor. Multigrade teaching has been adopted in developing nations as a remedy for these issues. But for teachers, especially in rural regions, teaching a varied mix of children in a same classroom poses serious difficulties. Therefore, it is essential to look at the challenges that instructors confront on the ground, especially in rural areas.

Due to a lower student population and larger geographic distribution, multigrade instruction is common in Pakistan's rural areas. The problem is in finding enough classrooms and teachers to teach in grade-appropriate groups. This study focuses on the challenges faced by teachers who instruct multigrade classrooms in rural schools. The purpose of the study is to examine the difficulties faced by teachers of physically challenged students. It might enable a deeper comprehension of the problems these teachers encounter.

Limitation of study:

Exploring the Experiences of Teachers Implementing Action Research in a Multi-Grade Classroom for Physically Challenged Students" is the potential lack of generalizability. Since the study focuses specifically on teachers implementing action research in a multi-grade classroom for physically challenged students, the findings may not be applicable to other educational settings or student populations. The experiences and challenges faced by teachers in this particular context may be influenced by factors unique to the specific classroom environment and the needs of physically challenged students. Therefore, caution should be exercised when extrapolating the findings to other educational contexts or student groups.

Delimitation of the study:

The study was conducted in govt. institute of special education in district Kasur Punjab. The study focused on experiences of teachers who taught in multigrade classroom of students with physically handicapped students.

Literature review:

The concept of multigrade teaching pertains to the scenario where a single teacher is responsible for instructing students from multiple grade levels within a single scheduled period, typically within the same classroom. Multigrade teaching is not a recent development and has been utilized in areas with low population density, where the enrollment of students does not allow for individual teachers per grade level. It is also prevalent in both developed and developing nations (Pridmore, P., 2007).

Teaching many grades creates a challenging working environment and it requires different curriculum, learning resources, evaluation methods, and learning processes than when teaching in a single grade. Multigrade teachers face difficulties managing various content levels because there is a lack of policy guidance for them (Mulaudzi, M. S. 2016). According to Taole and Mncube's (2012) study on teachers' experiences in multigrade classes in rural schools, most teachers find it difficult to design their lessons for these kinds of courses. They stated that teachers choose to use single planning for each grade rather than engaging in separate planning for the classes they instruct.

Tredoux, M. (2020) mentioned the study of Berry (2001) and Brown (2008) that teachers of multigrade classes face several challenges, such as professional and social isolation, negative parental attitudes, inadequate teaching materials and difficulties in classroom management.

According to Khazaei et al. (2016), a significant challenge encountered by teachers in multi-grade classrooms is the insufficient amount of time available. This issue is considered one of the primary difficulties associated with multi-grade classrooms.

Given the challenging educational landscape in many parts of Africa, particularly in rural and remote areas, multigrade pedagogy holds great potential to provide education to the most vulnerable children, provided that teachers are adequately trained and schools are well-equipped with teaching materials. The key to success lies in training teachers who possess the specific skills needed to effectively teach in multigrade classrooms, ensuring the delivery of quality education. However, the current teacher training model primarily focuses on monograde teaching and fails to address the realities faced by schools in rural Africa, neglecting the magnitude of the problem (Kivunja, 2014)

Khan, J. W., & Khan, S. A. (2008) study mentioned that almost 80% of Chitral's elementary schools, there are six different classrooms taught by two or three teachers in a multigrade arrangement. These teachers have primary teacher's certificates (PTCs) from elementary colleges or Islamabad's Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU), but they lack the necessary preparation to work with several grade levels. According to Khan, J. W., & Khan, S. A. (2008), it is strange that these teachers, who were only educated to teach single-grade classrooms, are required to work in a multigrade environment where they divide their time between two or three distinct grades for intervals of 35 to 40 minutes. Because of this, the other grades are either unoccupied or working on their own projects while the teacher is working with one grade such as writing, memorization, etc. Depending on the length of the school year, the curriculum may be given monthly.

Rationale of the study:

The rationale for conducting a study exploring the experiences of teachers implementing action research in a multi-grade classroom for physically challenged students stems from the need to enhance the educational experiences and outcomes for this specific group of students. Physically challenged students often require individualized support and tailored instructional approaches to meet their unique needs and abilities. The implementation of action research in a multi-grade classroom setting holds the potential to provide teachers with a systematic and reflective approach to address the diverse learning needs of physically challenged students. By examining the experiences of teachers who have engaged in action research within this context, valuable insights can be gained into the strategies, challenges, and benefits associated with this approach. This study aims to fill the existing research gap and provide evidence-based recommendations to inform the development of effective instructional practices in multi-grade classrooms for physically challenged students, ultimately fostering their academic success and overall well-being.

Settings

My research was carried out at a middle school at public sector with Lahore being the nearest city, approximately 45 km away. The school occupies a rented building with congested rooms and is situated in a deeply rural area, falling under the jurisdiction of the District Education Authority of the Government of Punjab. The school has only one center that caters to all four categories of disabilities, with a total enrollment of 163 students from all categories. Each category is taught by three teachers, except for the physically handicapped class, which has two teachers and a total of 25 students. The physically handicapped class is made up of students from multiple grades.

Classroom Setting: Sitting Arrangement

Researcher saw that students are divided into distinct grades based on their placement in the class

Instructional Materials

In the classroom, there are instructional materials for every grade, and teachers use them for the grades for which they were designed. However, teachers are unable to use these instructional materials effectively due to time constraints and a lack of training.

Participants

The each teacher is instructing a multigrade class consisting of four classes, which include students with cerebral palsy (CP). Within the section of physically handicapped children, there are various students with different grades and disabilities such as muscular dystrophy, Duchenne muscular dystrophy, polio, epilepsy, CP hemiplegic, and eleven students with cerebral palsy (CP). The 8th class

has one physically handicapped student, while the 6th and 5th classes each have one physically handicapped student. Furthermore, the 4th and 3rd classes have two physically handicapped students each, and the 2nd class has two as well.

The Researcher:

As a junior special education teacher at a government special education center in KotRadhaKishan for the past eleven years, I have firsthand experience working with students with various disabilities. Recently, I have noticed the concerns expressed by teachers of physically handicapped students regarding the challenges of teaching multigrade classes. These challenges include covering the syllabus, managing the classroom, providing instructional materials and strategies, and assessing students with diverse needs equitably. Furthermore, the limited time available when teaching multiple grades makes it difficult to effectively cover the curriculum designed for a single class.

Motivated by these concerns, researcher has embarked on an action research study to explore the perspectives of instructors who teach in multi grade classrooms. In Pakistan, there are no official programs that specifically address the development of multi grade teaching skills for teachers. Additionally, the current situation requires teachers to handle more than two classes simultaneously, which adds to the difficulty. The aim of this study is to examine the opportunities and challenges faced by instructors as they organize, instruct, manage the classroom, provide instructional materials, and assess students in multigrade classes.

Purpose of the study

- To examine at the difficulties and prospects that teachers have when organizing, instructing, running the classroom, distributing educational materials, and evaluating students in multi grade courses.
- To investigate the methods and approaches instructors employ to deal with the difficulties of instructing in classes with several grade levels.

Critical Questions

- What are challenges and opportunities that teachers encounter when planning, teaching, managing the classroom, delivering instructional materials, and assessing learners in multi grade classes?
- What are the strategies and techniques that teachers use to overcome the challenges of teaching in multi grade classrooms?

Methodology

The action research study utilized qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, to investigate the experiences of teachers in multi-grade settings and capture their perspectives. The interpretive paradigm was adopted to understand the ideologies and behaviors of the participants. Two female teachers working with physically disabled students in multi grade classes were purposefully selected. In-depth interviews were conducted, observations were made using a checklist, and the interviews were recorded for later review. Participant-generated data was carefully examined and organized for analysis. Artifacts, observations, and interviews were employed to gather information, with open-ended survey questions used to encourage varied responses. Data analysis occurred throughout the study, allowing for the identification of new themes, patterns, and areas requiring further investigation. The information was organized for easy retrieval, and coding and categorization were used to delineate themes (Denzin& Lincoln, 2003).

Validity

Ensuring validity is crucial in successful research as it guarantees that the collected data accurately represents the intended subject. To address validity in qualitative research, the researcher must adhere to principles of honesty, richness, detail, and objectivity. In this study, the researcher employed multiple data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and artifacts to enhance the reliability and validity of the study. Triangulation was utilized to further ensure the reliability and validity of the data by incorporating multiple perspectives (Maree, 2007). Member checks were conducted to validate the data, where participants reviewed the audio-recorded and transcribed data to confirm the authenticity of their voices (Chilisa&Preece, 2005). The use of various data generation techniques and audio recordings minimized the risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, thereby enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the collected data.

Ethical considerations

In this qualitative research, ethical considerations were prioritized due to direct involvement with individuals. Maintaining confidentiality and protecting participant identities through the use of codenames for both participants and the school was crucial to ensure anonymity. Consent from participants and permission from the principal were obtained prior to conducting interviews at the school. Respecting and preserving the privacy of participants encouraged them to provide relevant data. To uphold confidentiality, the audio-tapes were deleted once the data was transcribed. The study methodology was clearly explained to participants, emphasizing their voluntary participation and the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data collection

Data was collected at a school, focusing on teachers instructing physically challenged students in multi grade classes. The researcher, also a teacher, employed interviews, observations, and focus group discussions in two phases. Phase one involved in-depth interviews with two multigrade teachers to explore their experiences and challenges. In phase two, the researcher observed the teachers during their instructional activities and facilitated a focus group discussion to generate potential solutions for these challenges.

Phase 1 – Interviews

The initial data collection involved in-depth interviews with selected multigrade teachers at a school, aiming to gain insights into their experiences of teaching physically challenged students. Through purposeful conversations, the researcher asked questions, listened to their accounts, and recorded the interviews to obtain direct evidence of their challenges, support structures, and multi grade teaching practices. The purpose of these interviews was to gather valuable information and insights from the teachers' perspectives.

Phase 2 – Observations

In the second phase of the study, the focus was on observing teachers who taught multiple grades in a single teaching period. The purpose was to investigate the challenges and opportunities faced by these teachers in teaching physically challenged students in a multi grade classroom. The observations provided insights into effective engagement with learners from different grades, experiences in rural settings, and various aspects of teaching such as lesson delivery, classroom management, learner interaction, assessment, and feedback.

Phase 3- Focus Group Discussion

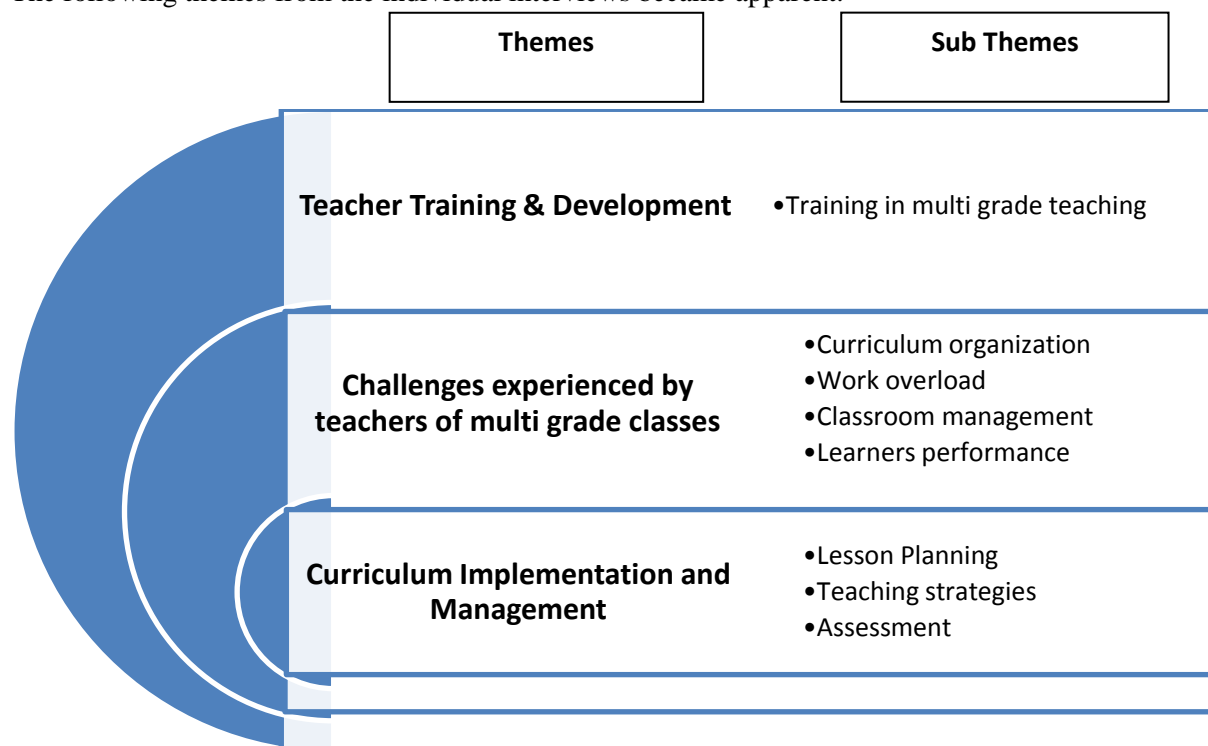
The purpose of the data gathering, conducted using focus groups, in the study on the experiences of teachers of physically challenged students in multi-grade classrooms, was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The chosen method, FCD (Cohen et al., 2007), provided in-depth insights. The focus group discussions aimed to gather detailed information from participants' subjective viewpoints regarding potential solutions or techniques to address challenges in multi grade classrooms.

Data analysis

During the data collection process, the researcher conducted a comprehensive analysis. This involved gathering field notes, recording participant voices, and reviewing audio-tapes. The transcripts were carefully read and organized chronologically to facilitate data comprehension. Categories were then identified to cluster the data into meaningful groups, employing open coding for descriptive data. The interpretation stage involved giving meaning to the data and reconstructing pertinent themes related to multi grade teaching. Specific events, records, and information were examined to understand the significance of multi grade teaching in rural classrooms. Finally, in the synthesis and generalization stage, the researcher brought together all the components of multi grade teaching to create a comprehensive understanding.

Analysis and interpretation of teacher's interviews

The following themes from the individual interviews became apparent:

**Theme 1: Teacher Training****1. Training in multigrade teaching**

The majority of the participants stated that they had not received any training on multigrade teaching when asked about it. They mentioned that the workshops for this particular aspect of teaching were non-existent. Despite being multigrade teachers, they only attended workshops that were meant for teaching a single grade. When asked about their experience, participants shared their responses.

Teacher A: *I have not received training in teaching multiple grade levels, and the workshops I attend only focus on single grade classes.*

Teacher B: *if the department could provide training in multigrade teaching, it could potentially improve their ability to teach in such classes. Although it may still be challenging, having this training would at least equip them with the knowledge and skills to work effectively in multigrade classes. Currently, without such training, main focus is to ensure that students are engaged with their work.*

According to participant opinion, multigrade teachers are not equipped with the knowledge and abilities needed to effectively instruct in these classes. Despite their particular teaching challenges, the fact that they attend the same seminars as instructors of single grades suggests that they are receiving the same treatment. They are therefore forced to make the necessary adjustments on their own to their general teaching knowledge in the multigrade classroom. Because of this, there is a critical need for training that is especially suited to multigrade teaching. Teachers are enthusiastic to participate in this program, which they anticipate will last for two to three months. They think that with the right instruction, the teaching and learning environment in these classes will be much enhanced.

Theme 2: Challenges Experienced by Teachers of Multigrade Classes

The individuals involved in this research contend that they face a range of obstacles when teaching in classes with multiple grade levels. They have highlighted that issues with the arrangement of the curriculum, excessive workloads, difficulties with managing the classroom, variations in student performance, and a lack of support are among the challenges they encounter.

2. Curriculum organization

The participants expressed that the arrangement of the curriculum posed a challenge for them. They conveyed that handling multigrade classes with four different grades in a single classroom, each

with their own syllabus, was arduous. Despite being in a multigrade setting, they had to adhere to the pace setters designated for each grade. The participants shared their perspective on the matter as follows:

Teacher A: *I cannot complete the content and work according to the pace setters for Grade 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 learners. It would need to teach each grade level separately for a subject like Social Sciences since the content differs from one grade level to another*

Teacher B: *curriculum as the main issue, because it is not possible for me to teach according to the pace setter for a specific grade level if learners from different grade levels are combined in the class. For instance, if a teacher is teaching a class comprising nursery, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, and CP children,.*

Teachers in multigrade classrooms face a challenge with curriculum organization. The prescribed curriculum for each grade creates a problem, as not being able to cover all the curricula for each grade could compromise effective learning in these classrooms. These sentiments indicate the difficulties that teachers face in managing the curriculum in such environments.

3. Work overload

The participants hinted that teachers in multigrade classrooms are burdened with an excessive workload. They claimed that planning for multigrade classes requires a lot of effort and that they have to create two assessment tasks for each subject, which adds to their workload. Despite having a small number of students in their classrooms, they feel overwhelmed by the number of subjects they are expected to teach. Moreover, they expressed dissatisfaction with not having enough personal time. The participants also mentioned that they are compelled to teach after regular school hours to cover the syllabus. In summary, this is how the participants expressed their concerns.

Teacher A: *the biggest challenge has to prepare different lessons and tasks for different grades, leaving them with no time for themselves and making it difficult to concentrate on individual learners. This also requires them to come to school early or stay late to teach the other grade separately. The workload is very tiring and presents numerous challenges.*

Teacher B: *the staff is small; I also have to handle administrative work, which often interrupts their classroom teaching. It may receive calls during class, requiring them to leave and attend to administrative tasks in the office. The amount of administrative work is overwhelming.*

The feedback provided indicates that educators are not content with instructing in classrooms with students of varying grades due to the excessive workload, which forces them to work additional hours. Additionally, despite being burdened with teaching duties, they are also expected to undertake administrative tasks within the school. The discontent expressed by these teachers is worrisome since it can result in unfavorable perceptions towards multigrade teaching.

4. Classroom management

According to the participants, their classrooms are excessively noisy, with one group playing while they are working with another group on assigned tasks. This situation occurs despite being given specific tasks to focus on. The participants articulated it as such:

Teacher A: *Another issue is that students in Grade 5 are tempted to interject when you are teaching Grade 4 students and they are struggling to respond to questions. They begin providing responses to those in Grade 4 because they are familiar with the material. The previous year, they received instruction. The lesson is hampered by this.*

Teacher B: *The noise is a problem for me. When you are preoccupied with the other grade, they don't remain silent. Even when you have assigned them tasks.*

Based on the aforementioned answers, it appears that these educators encounter challenges in handling their classrooms. Students are segregated by their grade level and taught individually. While the teacher focuses on one group, the other group is assigned a task to carry out on their own. These students are required to accomplish the task without the teacher's guidance, which proves to be arduous for them. Consequently, they frequently create disturbances and disrupt the other lesson.

5. Learner performance

One of the challenges mentioned by the participants is the need to improve learner performance. They pointed out that learners are unable to perform at their full potential due to the lack of attention given to their individual needs. Additionally, the fact that some learners advance to the

next grade without having acquired all the required skills was also mentioned as a problem by the participants, who expressed it in the following manner:

Teacher A: *These students move on to the following grade despite not having all the necessary skills. Due to the limited amount of time available for instruction, they advance without obtaining all the necessary abilities. While you are instructing one grade, the other grade will be left to wait for their time.*

Teacher B: *Despite not having all the required skills, these students advance to the next grade. They advance without acquiring all the required skills because of the little amount of time allotted for education. The other grade will have to wait for their turn while you instruct one.*

The teachers believe that teaching multiple grades at the same time negatively affects the performance of students. They argue that teaching two different curricula leaves little time to complete them, and students who are struggling don't receive the necessary remedial work.

Theme 3: Curriculum Implementation and Management

1. Lesson planning

Participants had different approaches to lesson planning. One planned for each grade, while others planned for a higher grade that included content from lower grades. One participant only prepared one lesson for a higher grade but included content for a lower grade. The rationale behind this approach was that teaching higher-grade content would help students progress to higher grades by being exposed to the content earlier.

Teacher A: *For those in higher grades, I have just one lesson plan. I create a lesson for Grade 5 and instruct all of these students in Grade 4 and Grade 5 classes on these issues, which are predominantly Grade 5 subjects (I mostly use these grades as examples). I don't go into much detail about Grade 4 work to make sure they comprehend. After passing at least the requirements for Grade 5, those in Grade 4 will move on to Grade 5.*

Teacher B: *We don't really have lesson plans, to be perfectly honest. I don't have any free time, there is nothing to do, and with the manner we are working, there is no time for anything else. I simply have a brief glance at what I'm going to teach before getting started.*

It illustrates the difficulties teachers in multigrade classes encounter while drafting lesson plans. Because there is a lack of policy direction and training in multigrade teaching, some students are treated as though they are in the same grade despite being in a different one, and other teachers exclusively focus on the higher grade. As a result, it is considered that the majority of teachers do not properly plan their lessons.

2. Teaching strategies used by multigrade teachers

It seems all participants' desired clarification on the teaching methods question. After further explanation, they gave the following answers:

Teacher A: *Depending on the course, I use various tactics, particularly group ways. We cannot claim to use a single technique. I employ several techniques.*

Teacher B: *I don't have any techniques we employ. The same techniques utilized in single classes are employed by me.*

The participants in a study on teaching methods mentioned using different methods. However, they were not sure which specific methods they were referring to and some mentioned using methods similar to those used in single grade classes without elaborating.

3. Assessment

Participants said that they assess learners based on their grades and each grade has its own tasks according to the curriculum.

Teacher A: *I evaluate students in accordance with the policy manual. To find out what will be evaluated, you look at the specific grade and the word. We evaluate them in accordance with their grades, which are far more challenging and time-consuming to produce separately.*

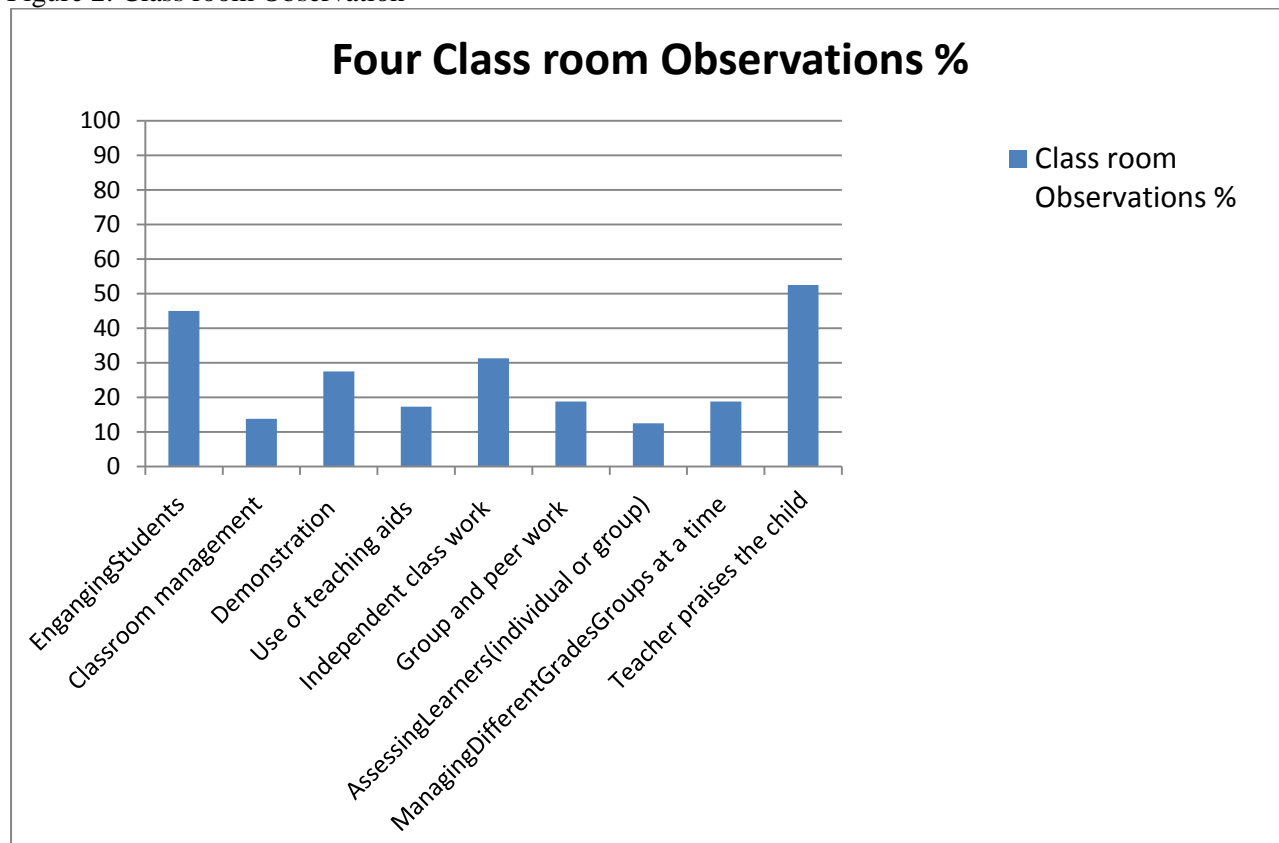
Teacher B: *I assign the same tasks to learners for informal assessments, especially in topics like languages where the content is nearly identical. We are given standard exam papers when it comes to official assignments. Therefore, it is necessary for us to divide these students. The following step is the writing of tests for each grade.*

Learners are assessed based on their grades and according to a policy document. Participants prepare different tasks for each grade when assessing learners. However, in subjects like math, learners are assessed separately in formal assessment tasks but given the same tasks during informal assessment tasks as the content is similar. Despite being in the same classroom, learners are recognized as having differences in learning. This is very difficult to manage and assess the students with their own potential in multi grade classes.

Observations:

Researcher conducted four lesson observations with participants to gain insight into how teachers teach in multi grade classes. Each lesson observation lasted for thirty minutes, and the observations were used to uncover information that participants might not have shared during the interviews. The author used a bar graph to display the participants' responses.

Figure 2: Class room Observation



In the context of the experiences of teachers in a multi-grade classroom with physically challenged students, the classroom observation results can be viewed as follows:

Engaging Students was observed to be at 45% of the total classroom observation time. This suggests that teachers face a challenge in consistently engaging physically challenged students in the learning process. It indicates that there may be difficulties in capturing their attention and maintaining their interest throughout the instructional time.

Classroom Management was observed to be at 13.75%. This finding implies that teachers encounter challenges in effectively managing the classroom environment in a multi-grade setting with physically challenged students. It suggests that there may be difficulties in maintaining discipline, order, and a conducive learning atmosphere for all students.

Demonstration was observed to be at 27.5% of the total classroom observation time. This suggests that teachers face challenges in effectively demonstrating and conveying information to physically challenged students. It indicates that additional effort may be required to ensure that the demonstrations are accessible, understandable, and meaningful for these students.

The Use of Teaching Aids was observed to be at 17.25%. This finding suggests that teachers encounter challenges in effectively utilizing teaching aids to support the learning of physically challenged students. It implies that there may be barriers in providing adequate access to appropriate teaching aids and ensuring their effective use in the classroom.

Independent Class Work was observed to be at 31.25% of the total classroom observation time. This indicates that teachers face challenges in facilitating independent work among physically challenged students in a multi-grade setting. It suggests that additional support and adaptations may be needed to promote self-directed learning and autonomy for these students.

Group and Peer Work were observed to be at 18.75% of the total classroom observation time. This finding implies that teachers encounter challenges in facilitating collaborative learning experiences for physically challenged students in a multi-grade classroom. It suggests that there may be difficulties in fostering effective group dynamics, cooperation, and peer support among these students.

Assessing Learners (individual or group) was observed to be at 12.5% of the total classroom observation time. This indicates that teachers face challenges in effectively assessing the progress and understanding of physically challenged students in a multi-grade setting. It suggests that additional strategies and adaptations may be necessary to accommodate the diverse needs and abilities of these students during assessments.

Managing Different Grades Groups at a time was observed to be at 18.75% of the total classroom observation time. This finding suggests that teachers encounter challenges in managing and addressing the individual needs of physically challenged students across different grade levels simultaneously. It implies that there may be difficulties in providing tailored instruction and support to meet the unique requirements of each student.

Teacher Praises the Child was observed to be at 52.5% of the total classroom observation time. This finding suggests that teachers may face challenges in effectively praising and recognizing the achievements of physically challenged students. It indicates that additional efforts may be needed to ensure consistent and meaningful positive reinforcement for these students.

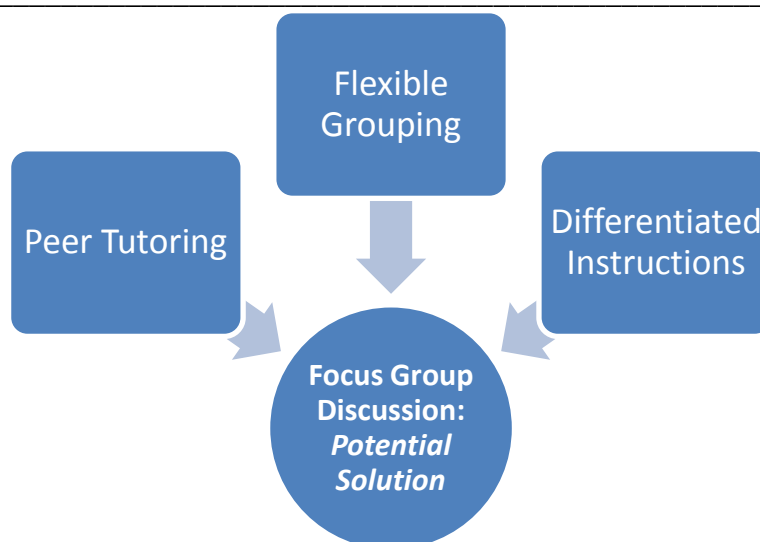
Analysis and interpretation of focus group discussion:

Teaching and learning strategies in multi grade classes may be best described as techniques or methods used to enhance teaching and facilitate learning in multi grade classes. Strategies may be peer tutoring, flexible grouping and differentiated instructions that are relevant to the level of development of different groups.

Teacher A: *“In my experience, creating a collaborative learning environment is key to promoting student learning and growth in a multi grade classroom. So peer tutoring is the best way to encourage students to work together and learn from one another, Additionally, flexible grouping, and scaffolding is also the best strategy to manage the students and sharing of knowledge. By leveraging these strategies and fostering a sense of community in the classroom, teacher will be able to support the academic and social-emotional development of students.”*

Teacher B: *“Multi grade teaching requires a unique set of solutions to ensure that all students are challenged and supported in their learning. I have found that differentiated instruction can be a powerful tool for engaging students and promoting.”*

In flexible grouping teachers can group students by ability or interest, rather than grade level, to provide targeted instruction and address individual needs. For example, advanced readers from different grades can be grouped together for a reading lesson, while struggling readers can receive additional support in a smaller group. Also teachers can differentiate instruction by adapting the content, process, and products of learning to meet the individual needs of each student. This can be done by providing different levels of support, resources, and materials to students based on their abilities and interests. Students from different grade levels can be paired up as tutors and tutees to provide peer support and feedback. This not only helps students to develop leadership and communication skills but also provides opportunities for cross-grade level learning.



Discussion:

The study revealed that teachers in multi-grade classrooms meet the minimum qualifications for teaching, but they lack experience in multi-grade instruction. Additionally, their in-service training is inadequate, and there is a lack of teacher development programs specifically designed for multi-grade teaching. Nawab, A., & Baig, S. R. (2011) Qoutes study of (White & Reid, 2008) and Miller (1991)that a teacher who has been prepared to teach in a single grade is assigned the responsibility of teaching in a multigrade context. Teachers should receive training that is appropriate for the setting and conditions in which they will be teaching, as well as the fact that multigrade classrooms are more complicated and demanding. According to, a multigrade classroom is not appropriate for a teacher who is timid novices or unqualified. The issue that teachers lack the expertise to teach multigrade classes is highlighted by Hyry-Belhammer, E. K., & Hascher (2015). This calls on teacher education institutions to create more professional training programs for preservice and in-service teachers in the area of multigrade teaching. The study reveals that teachers in multi-grade classes face various challenges. These challenges include curriculum organization, work overload, classroom management, and learner performance. Teaching a class with students from different grade levels simultaneously presents specific difficulties. Curriculum organization is particularly important to ensure that students receive appropriate education, meet grade-level standards, and achieve their learning goals. However, teachers encounter unique challenges in planning and implementing the curriculum in multi-grade classrooms. These challenges include differentiated instruction, time management, resource allocation, curriculum alignment, and classroom management, which require careful planning, adaptability, and creativity from the teacher's side. The similar issue was brought up by Mutambala, E. (2022), who contends that when students from several grades are combined in one class, they must nonetheless follow grade-appropriate curricula. According to Amin, N. (2020), this requirement is the biggest challenge of teaching to multiple grade levels because it necessitates that the curricula, learning resources, time management, and assessment strategies used in the multi-grade teaching and learning process take on a different shape from those used in a single grade class.

The study found that teaching several grades requires too much work from the teachers. This study suggests that multi-grade teaching requires greater planning and evaluation effort. Teachers have a lot on their mind in the classroom, but they also have to handle administrative tasks for the school. Thobi, N. (2022) asserts that teachers prefer single-grade classrooms since multi-grade classes need more planning, organization, preparation, and workload. According to Rotas, E. (2020), multigrade teachers have a moderate amount of stress as a result of their administrative duties, planning, and multigrade classes. Teaching multiple grades poses challenges for classroom management, particularly in terms of discipline. It is challenging for teachers to simultaneously work with two or more grades. The literature review suggests that when educators focus on one group, the other group must engage in separate activities. But the task is finished without the guidance or contribution of the teachers. The majority of the time, the students fails to finish the assignment that was given to them. (M. J. Taole 2014). According to a study done in the Netherlands with teachers of many grade levels, there were issues with the efficient use of class time, effective lesson planning,

effective classroom management, and the organization of the activities carried out by individual teachers (Engin, G. 2018). The study discovered that student performance is a concern in multi-grade classes. Teachers attribute this to the limited time available for remedial work and the challenge of teaching two classes with different curricula. As a result, teachers believe that students are unable to achieve their maximum potential in these circumstances. According to Mulaudzi, M. S. (2016), the majority of teachers think that multi-grade instruction does not improve students' performance. They contend that having to teach two grades with various curricula leaves them with insufficient time to finish the curriculum. Some of the participants asserted that because there isn't time for corrective work, learners who are less proficient only get worse. According to the report, multigrade teachers struggle with lesson planning. Some educators prepare their lessons as though they'll be instructing single-grade classrooms. Some of them don't even have lesson plans, while others merely prepare one lesson for the higher grade. Lesson plans are not followed by teachers who use them in class, but rather they are kept in files for record-keeping purposes (Perry, N. E., VandeKamp, K. O., Mercer, L. K., & Nordby, C. J. 2002). Teachers in the Turks and Caicos Islands reserved their most critical remarks for the difficulty of lesson planning that the multigrade classroom entailed. It is impossible to create lesson plans for two or more distinct grade levels and their various learning objectives, they claimed (LITTLE, A. W. 2006). The study also showed that teachers lack familiarity with the instructional strategies used in multi-grade teaching. These classes' instructors use the textbook approach. In the study "Investigating teaching methods in multi-grade classes in Austria and Finland", Beihammer and Hascher (2015) hypothesized that teaching methods were significantly different in multi-grade classes and were related to the teacher's personality, teaching subjects, and situations. As a result, teaching methods in multi-grade classes depend on the teacher's capability, subject, lesson's objectives, and class position. As a result, it is impossible to pinpoint the most popular technique, and determining which tactics are more successful is much harder. The study also showed that both formal and informal evaluations of the students in these classes are done independently. According to Velasco, Ramos, and Azarias (2022), evaluation is crucial for effective instruction since it helps teachers learn what the students already know, what they are capable of doing, and what interests them. When it comes to multi-grade teachers, they make care to evaluate their students utilizing a number of methods. In order to make learning more enjoyable, they use a range of assessments. According to Erden, H. (2020), a multi-grade teacher must develop assessment strategies to meet each student's unique needs because they all have different backgrounds, learning preferences, and needs. Teachers must be aware of these differences in order to gauge their students' progress. To determine whether predetermined objectives or goals are reached, assessment should be varied. In actuality, each classroom serves as an assessment environment through the usage of the teachers' assessment methods, the frequency of the assessment activities, the feedback provided to the students, and the presentation of the assessment findings (Buldur & Doan, 2014).

The focus group discussion suggested that differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, and flexible grouping are the best ways to enhance the teaching and learning process and get beyond any obstacles or difficulties that teachers in multi-grade classrooms may encounter. According to Taylor (2015), Differentiated Instruction is a way to show how educators combine tactics in addressing the needs, interests, and learning styles of their students, according to Naparan, G. B., & Alinsug, V. G. (2021). Differentiated instruction has been used in some capacity by every teacher who has ever taught in a classroom. When a student needs more time to complete an assignment, when they can choose what to read, when they receive different forms of exams, and in a plethora of other ways, teachers differentiate. Even if all of these tactics are effective, educators can improve their classrooms' responsiveness to students' needs by applying a more systematic differentiation strategy. With the use of a variety of tactics known as differentiated instruction, teachers can meet each student where they are when they first arrive at the classroom and help them advance as far as possible along the educational pavement. (Levy, H. M. 2008). The focus group discussion also recommended that there be group projects and peer tutoring, and that the teacher should group the students appropriately so that the quick learners can assist the slow learners. The students were divided into groups by the teachers based on their talents and abilities. They also provided exercises that were based on their learning standards. The exercises are then done with more diversity and creativity thanks to collaborative learning or cooperative learning. Peer tutoring, group projects, and various activities catered to the students' needs are effective in multigrade education. (G. B. Naparan & V. G. Alinsug

2021). Planning, differentiation, and peer tutoring were mentioned as instructional strategies to suit the requirements of students with Special educational requirements (SEN). Flexibility in grouping practices was also mentioned. Because of this, teachers in multi-grade courses are in a good position to differentiate instruction for students with special needs (SEN) and to use flexible grouping in their classes (Tiernan, Casserly, & Maguire 2020).

Conclusion:

The article discusses the various challenges faced by teachers in a multi grade setting, which include curriculum organization, work overload, classroom management, and student performance. These difficulties were identified through in-depth interviews conducted with teachers. It is noted that these challenges can significantly affect both the effectiveness of teachers and the learning outcomes of students. However, the study suggests that by addressing these issues, effective teaching and learning can still be achieved in a multi grade classroom.

In addition, the research findings reveal that certain techniques can enhance the quality of education in multi grade classrooms. The study highlights the effectiveness of peer tutoring, flexible grouping, and differentiated instruction as strategies that can improve teaching and learning outcomes. These findings were derived from conversations held in focus groups. Implementing these techniques can help overcome the challenges faced in multi grade settings, ultimately leading to improved educational experiences for both teachers and students.

Recommendations:

- The study recommends addressing challenges faced by teachers of multi grade classes by strengthening professional development for multi grade teaching skills for teachers, including in teacher training programs, and providing training for curriculum advisors.
- The study also suggests limiting multi grade classes to a maximum of two grades to make them more manageable for teachers and effective in implementing the curriculum.

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