



Contextualized Teaching Practices and Learner Engagement in Multigrade Elementary Education: Experiences of Grade Five Teachers in Mountain Province

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Abstract

Contextualized teaching has become an essential pedagogical approach in multigrade elementary education, particularly in geographically isolated and culturally diverse communities where learners possess varied educational experiences, cultural backgrounds, and learning needs. This qualitative study explored the contextualized teaching practices and learner engagement experiences of Grade Five teachers in multigrade elementary schools in Mountain Province. Utilizing a phenomenological qualitative research design, the study examined how teachers implement contextualized instruction, facilitate learner participation, and manage multigrade classroom realities within rural educational settings. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis involving twelve purposively selected Grade Five multigrade teachers. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework was utilized in analyzing the data. Findings revealed five major themes: (1) Localization and Cultural Integration in Multigrade Instruction; (2) Learner Engagement Through Experiential and Community-Based Learning; (3) Flexible and Differentiated Pedagogical Practices in Multigrade Classrooms; (4) Instructional Challenges and Resource Limitations in Rural Education; and (5) Teacher Adaptability, Creativity, and Commitment in Multigrade Teaching. Participants emphasized that contextualized teaching enhanced learner participation, comprehension, collaboration, and appreciation of local culture and community experiences. Teachers utilized local examples, indigenous practices, environmental resources, and community-based activities to make instruction more meaningful and relatable for learners. However, participants also encountered challenges related to limited instructional resources, time constraints, multigrade classroom management, diverse learner abilities, and inadequate training for multigrade instruction. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience, pedagogical innovation, and strong professional commitment in sustaining meaningful learner engagement. The study concludes that contextualized and culturally responsive pedagogies significantly strengthen learner engagement and instructional effectiveness in multigrade elementary education. Findings provide implications for multigrade curriculum implementation, teacher professional development, localized instruction, and educational policy enhancement in rural schools.

Keywords: contextualized teaching, learner engagement, multigrade education, rural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, elementary education, qualitative research



1. Introduction

Education in geographically isolated and rural communities presents unique instructional realities and pedagogical challenges that require adaptive, contextualized, and learner-centered teaching approaches. In multigrade elementary schools, teachers simultaneously manage learners from different grade levels, learning abilities, and developmental stages within a single classroom environment. Consequently, multigrade education requires instructional flexibility, differentiated teaching strategies, and meaningful contextualization of learning experiences to address learners' diverse educational needs effectively.

Contextualized teaching has emerged as an important pedagogical approach in Philippine education, particularly in rural and culturally diverse communities. Contextualized instruction involves connecting curriculum content to learners' lived experiences, local culture, environmental realities, community practices, and indigenous knowledge systems. Such approaches make learning more relevant, meaningful, and engaging for learners by allowing them to connect academic concepts with familiar situations and community experiences.

In multigrade classrooms, contextualized teaching becomes especially significant because learners possess varying levels of readiness, learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and academic competencies. Teachers often utilize localized examples, environmental resources, community participation, and culturally relevant instructional materials to facilitate meaningful learning experiences across multiple grade levels simultaneously. Through contextualized instruction, learners become more actively engaged in classroom discussions, collaborative activities, and experiential learning opportunities.

Mountain Province in the Philippines presents a distinct educational context characterized by geographically isolated schools, indigenous cultural communities, and multigrade classroom arrangements. Teachers in these communities navigate instructional realities involving limited educational resources, diverse learner needs, and complex classroom management responsibilities while ensuring quality education for learners across different grade levels.

Despite the recognized importance of contextualized and culturally responsive instruction, limited qualitative studies have explored the lived experiences and pedagogical practices of multigrade teachers in rural Philippine educational settings. Existing literature often focuses on learner achievement and curriculum implementation while giving limited attention to teachers' classroom experiences, instructional adaptations, and learner engagement practices in multigrade contexts.

2. Objectives of the Study

Thus, this study explored the contextualized teaching practices and learner engagement experiences of Grade Five teachers in multigrade elementary education in Mountain Province. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do Grade Five teachers describe their experiences in implementing contextualized teaching practices in multigrade classrooms?
2. What pedagogical approaches and instructional strategies do teachers utilize to promote learner engagement?

3. How does contextualized instruction influence learner participation and classroom interaction?
4. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing contextualized instruction within multigrade educational settings?
5. How do teachers address instructional and classroom management challenges in multigrade education?

The findings of the study may contribute to multigrade education practices, contextualized curriculum implementation, culturally responsive pedagogy, teacher professional development, and educational policy enhancement in rural elementary schools.

3. Review of Related Literature

3.1 Contextualized Teaching and Learning

Contextualized teaching refers to instructional approaches that connect academic concepts to learners' lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and community realities. According to Johnson (2019), contextualized learning enables learners to construct meaning by relating classroom lessons to real-life situations and familiar experiences. Such pedagogical approaches strengthen learner engagement, comprehension, and knowledge retention.

In rural educational settings, contextualized teaching allows teachers to utilize local resources, indigenous knowledge, environmental experiences, and community practices as instructional tools. Learners become more motivated when lessons are connected to their daily lives and cultural realities.

3.2 Multigrade Education and Differentiated Instruction

Multigrade education involves the teaching of learners from multiple grade levels within a single classroom by one teacher. According to Little (2020), multigrade teaching requires instructional flexibility, classroom organization skills, and differentiated pedagogical practices to address diverse learner needs simultaneously.

Teachers in multigrade settings frequently utilize peer learning, collaborative activities, group instruction, independent learning tasks, and contextualized teaching strategies to facilitate effective classroom management and learner engagement.

3.3 Learner Engagement in Elementary Education

Learner engagement refers to learners' active participation, emotional involvement, behavioral interaction, and cognitive investment in classroom learning activities. According to Fredricks et al. (2019), engaged learners demonstrate greater motivation, classroom participation, academic persistence, and learning achievement.

Contextualized and experiential learning environments strengthen learner engagement by promoting relevance, collaboration, and meaningful participation in classroom activities.

3.4 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Indigenous Communities

Culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes the integration of learners' cultural identities, traditions, and experiences into educational practices. According to Geneva Gay, culturally responsive teaching promotes inclusivity, learner participation, and meaningful educational experiences by recognizing cultural diversity as a valuable educational resource.

In indigenous and rural communities, contextualized instruction helps preserve local culture while enhancing learners' connection to school learning experiences.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Constructivist Learning Theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky, which posits that learners construct knowledge through social interaction, collaboration, and meaningful experiences. The study also utilized Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Theory developed by Geneva Gay, emphasizing the importance of integrating learners' cultural experiences and community realities into instruction.

These theories guided the interpretation of teachers' contextualized instructional practices, learner engagement strategies, and multigrade classroom experiences.

5. Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences, contextualized teaching practices, and learner engagement strategies of Grade Five teachers in multigrade elementary schools. Phenomenology was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gain deeper understanding of teachers' pedagogical experiences, classroom realities, and instructional adaptations within multigrade educational settings.

The study was conducted in selected multigrade elementary schools in Mountain Province. The locale was selected because of its geographically isolated educational contexts, multigrade classroom arrangements, and culturally diverse indigenous communities.

The participants consisted of twelve Grade Five teachers selected through purposive sampling. Participants met the following criteria: currently teaching in multigrade elementary schools, possessing at least three years of multigrade teaching experience, actively implementing contextualized instruction, and willing to participate in interviews and classroom observations.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis of lesson plans, instructional materials, and classroom activity records. The interview guide focused on teachers' contextualized teaching experiences, learner engagement practices, classroom management strategies, instructional challenges, and pedagogical reflections regarding multigrade instruction.

Ethical considerations including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and respect for participants' cultural and professional perspectives were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Interview transcripts, classroom observation notes, and instructional documents were coded and categorized to identify recurring patterns and themes related to contextualized teaching and learner

engagement in multigrade classrooms. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement within the research setting.

6. Results and Findings

Theme 1: Localization and Cultural Integration in Multigrade Instruction

Participants emphasized the importance of integrating local culture, indigenous practices, environmental realities, and community experiences into classroom instruction. Teachers explained that contextualized lessons became more meaningful and understandable for learners.

One participant shared:

“Mas naiintindihan ng learners ang lessons kapag ginagamit namin ang examples mula sa community.”

Another participant stated:

“Kapag local culture at experiences ang kasama sa lesson, mas interesado silang matuto.”

Teachers integrated agricultural practices, local traditions, environmental observations, and indigenous community experiences into classroom discussions and learning activities.

These findings support Gay’s culturally responsive pedagogy theory, which emphasizes the importance of connecting instruction to learners’ cultural identities and lived experiences.

Theme 2: Learner Engagement Through Experiential and Community-Based Learning

Participants described experiential learning and community-based activities as effective strategies for promoting learner engagement in multigrade classrooms.

One participant explained:

“Mas active ang learners kapag actual experiences at hands-on activities ang ginagamit.”

Another teacher remarked:

“Nagiging mas participative sila kapag may outdoor at community-based activities.”

Teachers utilized environmental exploration, collaborative projects, storytelling, group discussions, and practical demonstrations to strengthen learner participation and interaction.

These findings align with constructivist learning principles emphasizing active participation and experiential learning as foundations of meaningful educational engagement.

Theme 3: Flexible and Differentiated Pedagogical Practices in Multigrade Classrooms

Participants emphasized the need for flexibility and differentiated instruction in addressing the diverse learning needs of multigrade learners.

One participant shared:

“Kailangan flexible ang teaching dahil iba-iba ang levels at needs ng learners.”

Another participant stated:

“Ginagamit namin ang peer tutoring at differentiated activities para matulungan ang bawat learner.”

Teachers implemented group instruction, peer-assisted learning, individualized activities, and differentiated assessment strategies to manage multigrade classroom instruction effectively.

These findings support Little (2020), who emphasized that multigrade teaching requires adaptive and differentiated pedagogical approaches.

Theme 4: Instructional Challenges and Resource Limitations in Rural Education

Participants encountered challenges related to limited instructional materials, insufficient classroom resources, multigrade classroom management, and time constraints.

One participant explained:

“Mahirap minsan magturo dahil kulang ang materials at marami ang grade levels sa isang classroom.”

Another teacher shared:

“Challenge talaga ang time management sa multigrade setup.”

Teachers also described difficulties related to transportation, geographical isolation, and limited access to technological resources within rural schools.

These findings reflect the continuing instructional realities experienced by teachers in geographically isolated educational contexts.

Theme 5: Teacher Adaptability, Creativity, and Commitment in Multigrade Teaching

Despite instructional challenges, participants demonstrated resilience, creativity, and strong professional commitment in sustaining meaningful learning experiences for multigrade learners.

One participant stated:

“Kahit mahirap ang multigrade teaching, ginagawa namin ang best para matuto ang mga bata.”

Another participant remarked:

“Kailangan talagang creative at resourceful sa pagtuturo sa multigrade classrooms.”

Teachers improvised instructional materials, utilized local resources, strengthened community collaboration, and developed flexible teaching strategies to address classroom challenges.

These findings demonstrate the significant role of teacher adaptability and professional dedication in maintaining instructional effectiveness within rural multigrade schools.

7. Discussion

The findings revealed that contextualized teaching practices significantly strengthen learner engagement, participation, comprehension, and cultural appreciation in multigrade elementary education. Teachers effectively integrated local culture, indigenous knowledge, environmental experiences, and community realities into classroom instruction to create meaningful learning experiences for learners.

The study further highlighted that multigrade teaching requires instructional flexibility, differentiated pedagogies, collaborative learning strategies, and adaptive classroom management practices. Contextualized and experiential learning activities promoted active learner participation and strengthened connections between classroom lessons and real-life experiences.

However, participants also encountered significant instructional challenges related to resource limitations, multigrade classroom management complexities, geographical isolation, and diverse learner needs. These contextual realities require strong institutional support, localized instructional resources, and sustained teacher professional development initiatives.

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience, creativity, and professional commitment in implementing contextualized instruction and sustaining learner engagement within rural multigrade classrooms.

8. Conclusions

The study revealed that Grade Five teachers in multigrade elementary schools in Mountain Province implement contextualized teaching practices through localization, cultural integration, experiential learning, and differentiated instruction to promote learner engagement and meaningful participation.

Teachers emphasized that contextualized instruction strengthens learners' comprehension, cultural appreciation, classroom interaction, and motivation to learn. However, instructional challenges related to limited resources, multigrade classroom management, time constraints, and geographical isolation continue to affect instructional delivery.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated adaptability, creativity, and professional commitment in sustaining meaningful and culturally responsive learning experiences for multigrade learners. The findings further suggest that effective multigrade education requires strengthened institutional support, contextualized curriculum implementation, and continuous teacher capacity-building initiatives.

9. Implications

The findings imply the need for strengthened teacher professional development programs focusing on multigrade instruction, contextualized pedagogy, differentiated teaching strategies, and culturally responsive education.

Educational institutions and policymakers may also improve instructional support systems by providing localized learning resources, multigrade instructional materials, and technological support for geographically isolated schools.

School administrators may encourage collaborative instructional planning, community participation, and peer mentoring systems among multigrade teachers to strengthen classroom practices and learner engagement.

Future studies may further explore learners' perspectives, indigenous educational practices, and comparative multigrade teaching experiences across diverse rural educational settings.

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