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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Educational Experiences and Student Development at Can-Eo Chapyusen Multigrade School, Bontoc Mountain Province

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#### Abstract

**Keywords:** multigrade education; educational experiences; student development; rural schooling; peer-assisted learning; community support

This study examined the educational experiences and student development at Can-Eo Chapyusen Multigrade School in Bontoc Mountain Province, a rural school implementing multigrade instruction to address geographic and resource constraints. Using a qualitative case study design, the research explored how multigrade teaching practices shape learners' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development, as well as the challenges and support systems influencing the learning process. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents, and school stakeholders; focus group discussions with learners; classroom observations; and document analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and meanings across data sources. Findings revealed that educational experiences in the multigrade classroom were characterized by adaptive and learner-centered instructional practices, including differentiated tasks, independent learning, and peer-assisted instruction. These practices supported gradual academic development in literacy and numeracy, particularly through peer learning across grade levels. The multigrade environment also fostered positive social, emotional, and behavioral development, as learners demonstrated cooperation, responsibility, empathy, and leadership. Despite these benefits, teachers and learners encountered challenges related to heavy workload, limited instructional time, and inadequate learning resources. Strong support systems, including teacher resilience, parental involvement, and community participation, were found to mitigate these challenges and sustain meaningful learning experiences. The study concludes that multigrade education at Can-Eo Chapyusen Multigrade School contributes positively to holistic student development and serves as a viable and context-responsive educational model in geographically isolated communities. The findings underscore the need for targeted professional development, resource support, and policy interventions to strengthen multigrade instruction and enhance educational equity in rural settings.

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## INTRODUCTION

Multigrade schooling remains a vital educational arrangement for geographically isolated, sparsely populated, and underserved communities where organizing a complete monograde class per grade level is not feasible. In the Philippine context, the Multigrade Program in Philippine Education (MPPE) has long been positioned as a strategy for expanding access while pursuing quality, particularly in remote communities where teachers simultaneously handle learners from different grade levels and developmental stages. A national-level program review by SEAMEO INNOTECH notes that multigrade schooling can produce learning outcomes comparable to monograde settings and highlights enabling factors such as innovative instruction, authentic assessment, and strong community engagement, while also pointing to constraints such as multiple teacher roles and limited monitoring systems tailored to multigrade realities. In multigrade classrooms, teachers are expected to manage differentiation, time-on-task, and multiple curricula, which often increases planning demands and requires stronger pedagogical flexibility. Research syntheses and reviews have repeatedly shown that, in many settings, multigrade or mixed-grade arrangements produce no consistent disadvantage in achievement when compared with single-grade classes, although outcomes vary depending on context, teacher preparation, and the quality of instruction. At the same time, scholars caution that administrative “combination classes” can sometimes show small negative effects on achievement if created primarily due to staffing constraints and implemented without adequate support, underscoring the importance of examining the actual lived experience and support conditions within specific schools.

International evidence further suggests that the effects of multigrade grouping are closely linked to classroom processes and peer dynamics. Studies exploring grade/age composition indicate that mixed-grade classes can yield few overall differences from single-grade classes, yet peer processes (e.g., learning with more mature peers) can shape both academic and social outcomes in nuanced ways. Related work using large-scale or quasi-experimental approaches finds that grade mixing may benefit achievement in certain conditions (e.g., exposure to older peers), though the presence of younger peers can also introduce instructional trade-offs. Other research reports negative test-score associations in some contexts, again pointing to the role of local policy rules, class size, and implementation quality. Beyond achievement, multigrade classrooms are frequently associated with opportunities for peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and social interaction; however, these potential benefits are not automatic and require intentional structuring by teachers.

Within the Philippines, empirical work has increasingly documented the realities of multigrade teaching as a professional and instructional challenge, especially in remote areas. A Philippine study on multigrade teachers’ classroom strategies reported that teachers rely heavily on classroom management routines, collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, real-life contextualization, and flexible teaching to address multiple grade-level demands. Complementary phenomenological research identified persistent constraints such as limited resources, language barriers, and the need for contextualized materials particularly salient in Indigenous and rural settings. Another phenomenological study focused on multigrade teachers’ challenges and coping strategies in the Philippines, describing stresses linked to workload, limited training, difficult travel conditions, resource gaps, and weak stakeholder support, alongside coping mechanisms such as planning, time management, and reliance on community and faith-based supports. In the Cordillera setting, where linguistic diversity is high and many schools include multigrade arrangements, DepEd research on MTB-MLE implementation in Bauko I, Mountain Province reported continuing challenges around the sufficiency of mother-tongue materials and orthography variations factors that can shape comprehension, participation, and confidence among young learners in multigrade contexts. Taken together, the literature suggests that multigrade schooling is not merely a class-organization issue; it is a learning ecology shaped by instruction, language and culture, peer relations, teacher preparation, and community support making localized school-based inquiry essential.

Anchored on these realities, the present study, *Educational Experiences and Student Development at Can-EO Chapyusen Multigrade School, Bontoc Mountain Province*, investigates how learners experience schooling in a multigrade environment and how these experiences connect to their academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development. It also examines the challenges and support systems shaping learning and proposes context-responsive recommendations suited to the school’s realities.

Although there is substantial research on multigrade education internationally often concluding that achievement differences are generally small or inconsistent across contexts the evidence also shows that outcomes depend strongly on implementation conditions (teacher preparation, instructional quality, resources, and classroom processes), and these conditions vary widely even within the same country. In the Philippine setting, existing studies have largely concentrated on teachers' strategies, challenges, and coping in multigrade schools, while fewer studies deeply integrate (1) learners' narrated educational experiences, (2) holistic student development outcomes (academic plus social- emotional - behavioral development), and (3) multi-stakeholder perspectives (students, teachers, parents/community) within a single, bounded rural school case. Moreover, while Cordillera-based research highlights language and material constraints relevant to multigrade settings, there remains a need for a site-specific, context-rich account that links day-to-day learning experiences to student development within a particular multigrade school in Bontoc Mountain Province especially one that can surface how classroom interaction patterns, peer learning, and support systems operate in practice. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on Can-Eo Chapyusen Multigrade School as a localized case and aligning inquiry directly with the objectives: describing educational experiences, examining academic and socio-emotional development, identifying challenges, mapping support systems, and generating context-responsive recommendations.

## OBJECTIVES

The study aims to examine the educational experiences and student development at Can-Eo Chapyusen Multigrade School in Bontoc Mountain Province. Specifically, it seeks to describe the learning experiences of students in a multigrade classroom setting, focusing on instructional strategies, learning activities, and classroom interactions that shape their day-to-day schooling. It also aims to examine students' academic development in terms of literacy, numeracy, and subject mastery as influenced by multigrade teaching practices. In addition, the study explores the social, emotional, and behavioral development of learners within the multigrade environment, highlighting how peer interaction, teacher support, and classroom dynamics contribute to holistic growth. The study further identifies the challenges encountered by both students and teachers in delivering and experiencing quality education in a multigrade school, as well as the support systems and coping strategies provided by teachers, parents, and the community. Finally, it analyzes the perceived impact of multigrade education on students' overall development and proposes context-responsive recommendations to strengthen educational practices and student development in multigrade schools in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study research design to examine the educational experiences and student development at Can-Eo Chapyusen Multigrade School in Bontoc Mountain Province. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because the study aimed to gain an in-depth and context-sensitive understanding of learners' experiences, developmental outcomes, challenges, and support systems within a specific multigrade school setting. The case study design allowed for a holistic exploration of the phenomenon as it occurred in its real-life context, consistent with the objectives of describing instructional practices, examining academic and socio-emotional development, and analyzing the perceived impact of multigrade education.

The research locale was Can-Eo Chapyusen Multigrade School, a rural multigrade elementary school in Bontoc Mountain Province. The school was selected purposively due to its multigrade structure, geographic context, and relevance to issues of access, equity, and quality education in geographically isolated areas. The participants of the study included multigrade teachers, selected learners from different grade levels, parents or guardians, and school stakeholders such as the school head or community representatives. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling, ensuring that those included had direct experience and meaningful involvement in the multigrade educational process.

Data were gathered using multiple qualitative data collection methods to ensure depth and triangulation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, school administrators, and parents to explore instructional practices, perceived student development, challenges encountered, and support mechanisms. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with selected learners, using age-appropriate and ethically sensitive techniques, to elicit their educational experiences, peer interactions, and perceptions of learning in a multigrade classroom. In addition, classroom observations were carried out to document instructional strategies, learner engagement, classroom interactions, and differentiation practices across grade levels. Relevant school documents such as lesson plans, instructional materials, learner progress records, and school reports were also reviewed to supplement and validate interview and observation data.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach. All interview and FGD responses were transcribed verbatim, while observation notes and documents were organized systematically. The researcher engaged in repeated reading of the data to achieve familiarization, followed by initial coding to identify meaningful units related to the objectives of the study. Codes were then clustered into broader themes reflecting educational experiences, academic development, social-emotional and behavioral development, challenges in multigrade instruction, support systems, and perceived impacts of multigrade education. Thematic patterns were interpreted by relating them to existing literature and the contextual realities of multigrade schooling.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The findings of this qualitative case study emerged from the thematic analysis of data gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis. The results are presented according to the objectives of the study and organized into major themes that reflect the educational experiences and student development at Can-Eo Chapyusen Multigrade School, Bontoc Mountain Province.

### Theme 1: Adaptive and Learner-Centered Educational Experiences in a Multigrade Setting

Learners' educational experiences in the multigrade classroom were characterized by flexibility, adaptation, and learner-centered practices. Teachers employed differentiated instruction, independent learning tasks, and rotational teaching strategies to manage multiple grade levels simultaneously. Classroom observations revealed that students often worked independently or in small peer groups while the teacher attended to another grade level.

#### Participant Responses:

*"Sanay na kami na magtrabaho mag-isa habang nagtuturo si teacher sa ibang baitang. Kapag tapos na, tinutulungan kami ng mas matatanda."* (Student)

*"Kailangan talagang maging flexible. Hindi puwedeng pare-pareho ang gawain dahil iba-iba ang baitang."* (Teacher)

These findings suggest that multigrade education fosters learner autonomy and adaptability. Students develop responsibility for their own learning, while teachers exercise pedagogical flexibility to accommodate diverse learning needs. The multigrade environment thus shapes educational experiences that differ from traditional monograde classrooms but remain meaningful and engaging.

### Theme 2: Gradual Academic Development Supported by Peer Learning

Academic development in literacy and numeracy was evident but gradual. Teachers reported that peer tutoring and cross-grade interaction played a significant role in supporting learning. Younger learners benefited from observing and interacting with older peers, while older learners reinforced their understanding by assisting younger classmates.

**Participant Responses:**

*"Mas mabilis matuto ang bata kapag may mas matandang tumutulong."* (Teacher)

*"Natutuwa ako kapag tinuturuan ko ang Grade 4, mas naiintindihan ko rin ang aralin."* (Older student)

The findings indicate that multigrade instruction supports academic development through social learning mechanisms. Peer-assisted learning enhances comprehension and retention, although progress may be uneven due to limited instructional time and competing grade-level demands.

**Theme 3: Enhanced Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Development**

The multigrade classroom environment promoted positive social relationships, emotional maturity, and responsible behavior. Learners displayed cooperation, patience, respect, and leadership, particularly among older students who assumed mentoring roles. Behavioral issues were minimal and were often resolved through peer mediation and teacher guidance.

**Participant Responses:**

*"Parang magkakapatid na ang mga bata, nagtutulongan kahit iba-iba ang edad."* (Parent)

*"Natuto akong maging pasensyoso at tumulong sa iba."* (Student)

These findings suggest that multigrade schooling contributes positively to learners' socio-emotional and behavioral development. Mixed-age interaction nurtures empathy, leadership, and self-regulation, supporting holistic student development beyond academic outcomes.

Difference between the posttest scores of students in the Control and Experimental groups

**Theme 4: Instructional and Structural Challenges in Multigrade Teaching**

Despite positive outcomes, teachers and learners experienced several challenges. Teachers reported heavy workloads, limited instructional materials, and insufficient time to address individual learner needs. Students expressed difficulty when waiting for teacher assistance or when lessons progressed too quickly.

**Participant Responses:**

*"Mahirap talagang hatiin ang oras sa lahat ng baitang."* (Teacher)

*"Minsan hindi ko agad maintindihan kasi may tinuturuan pa si teacher."* (Student)

These challenges highlight systemic and structural constraints inherent in multigrade education, particularly in rural and geographically isolated areas. While teachers demonstrate commitment and resilience, limitations in resources and staffing affect the depth and consistency of instruction.

**Theme 5: Strong Support Systems and Coping Strategies**

Teachers employed various coping strategies to manage multigrade instruction effectively, including careful lesson planning, integration of subjects, peer tutoring, and collaboration with parents and community members. Parents supported learning at home and participated in school activities, while the community contributed to school maintenance and contextual learning.

**Participant Responses:**

*"Malaking tulong ang mga magulang at komunidad sa paaralan."* (School head)

*"Tinuturuan namin ang anak sa bahay kahit kaunti."* (Parent)

The presence of strong support systems mitigates some of the challenges of multigrade teaching. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community enhances the sustainability of educational practices and reinforces

learning beyond the classroom.

### **Theme 6: Positive Perceived Impact of Multigrade Education on Holistic Student Development**

Stakeholders generally perceived multigrade education as having a positive impact on students' overall development. Learners developed independence, confidence, adaptability, and a sense of responsibility alongside academic skills. Despite challenges, multigrade education was viewed as a meaningful and contextually appropriate learning arrangement.

#### **Participant Responses:**

*"Hindi lang akademikong kaalaman ang natutunan ng mga bata kundi disiplina at pakikipagkapwa."* (Teacher)

*"Handa na ang mga bata sa mas mataas na baitang dahil sanay na silang mag-adjust."* (School head)

These findings indicate that multigrade education contributes to holistic student development by nurturing both cognitive and non-cognitive competencies. The multigrade setting prepares learners to become resilient, socially responsible, and adaptable individuals.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, credibility was established through data triangulation across interviews, FGDs, observations, and documents, as well as member checking with selected participants to validate interpretations. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of the research context and participants. Dependability and confirmability were enhanced by maintaining an audit trail of research procedures, coding decisions, and analytic memos.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants, while assent and parental consent were secured for student participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by using pseudonyms and safeguarding all research data. The study adhered to ethical standards in educational research, ensuring respect, voluntary participation, and the protection of participants' rights.

Through this methodology, the study systematically addressed the objectives by capturing rich, contextualized accounts of educational experiences and student development in a multigrade school, ultimately providing a sound basis for context-responsive recommendations.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal that educational experiences in a multigrade classroom are shaped by adaptability, learner-centered instruction, and strong interpersonal relationships. Consistent with the objectives, the study demonstrated that multigrade teaching at Can-Eo Chapyusen Multigrade School fostered flexible instructional practices that encouraged learner autonomy and peer collaboration. Teachers' use of differentiated tasks, independent learning, and peer tutoring aligns with existing literature which emphasizes that effective multigrade instruction relies on instructional flexibility and strategic classroom management rather than rigid grade-level segregation. The observed learner independence and self-regulation indicate that multigrade environments can cultivate responsibility and initiative among students when appropriately facilitated.

In terms of academic development, the findings indicate gradual yet meaningful progress in literacy and numeracy, supported largely by peer-assisted learning. Younger learners benefited from exposure to advanced content and modeling from older peers, while older learners reinforced their own learning through teaching roles. This supports social constructivist perspectives which view learning as a socially mediated process. However, the uneven pace of academic progress reported by teachers highlights the persistent instructional challenges associated with limited time and competing grade-level demands, underscoring that multigrade education requires sustained pedagogical support and adequate resources to optimize learning outcomes.

The study further revealed that multigrade schooling positively influenced students' social, emotional, and behavioral development. Mixed-age interaction fostered cooperation, empathy, leadership, and emotional maturity attributes that are often less emphasized in monograde classrooms.

The minimal behavioral issues observed suggest that the multigrade setting encourages a family-like classroom culture that promotes mutual respect and collective responsibility. These findings reinforce the notion that multigrade education contributes significantly to holistic development, extending learning beyond academic competencies.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study identified structural and instructional challenges that constrained teaching and learning. Teachers' heavy workload, limited instructional materials, and insufficient time to address individual learning needs reflect systemic issues commonly faced by multigrade schools in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. These challenges highlight the need for policy-level interventions and targeted support mechanisms tailored specifically to the realities of multigrade education.

Importantly, the findings also emphasized the role of strong support systems and coping strategies. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community emerged as a critical factor in sustaining learning. Community involvement and parental support not only supplemented classroom instruction but also reinforced the relevance of education within the local context. This underscores the value of school–community partnerships in enhancing educational delivery in rural multigrade schools.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that multigrade education at Can-Eo Chapyusen Multigrade School provides meaningful and developmentally supportive learning experiences despite inherent challenges. Educational experiences in the multigrade classroom are characterized by adaptive teaching practices, learner independence, and peer-supported learning. These experiences contribute positively to students' academic growth, particularly in literacy and numeracy, while also fostering strong social, emotional, and behavioral development.

The study further concludes that multigrade schooling promotes holistic student development by nurturing values such as cooperation, responsibility, empathy, and resilience. While instructional and structural challenges persist particularly related to teacher workload, time constraints, and resource limitations teachers' commitment, effective coping strategies, and strong community support mitigate these difficulties. Overall, multigrade education in this context is not merely a compensatory arrangement but a viable and meaningful educational model that responds to the needs of learners in geographically isolated communities.

### **Educational Practice**

The findings imply that multigrade teachers should be provided with continuous professional development focused on differentiated instruction, classroom management, and peer-assisted learning strategies. Schools may further institutionalize peer tutoring and independent learning systems as core instructional practices to maximize learning time and student engagement.

### **School Leadership and Community Engagement**

School leaders should strengthen partnerships with parents and community members, recognizing their vital role in supporting learning and sustaining school programs. Community-based learning activities and contextualized instructional materials can further enhance relevance and learner motivation.

### **Policy and Program Development**

At the policy level, the study underscores the need for DepEd and other education stakeholders to design targeted interventions for multigrade schools, including adequate teaching resources, instructional materials,

and workload-sensitive teacher deployment. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should also be tailored to the unique conditions of multigrade settings rather than relying solely on monograde standards.

### Future Research

The study suggests that future research may adopt mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine learning outcomes over time and compare multigrade and monograde settings more systematically. Further studies may also explore learner voices in greater depth or investigate the effectiveness of specific instructional innovations in multigrade classrooms.

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