



Multi-Grade Teaching Practices and Self- Learning Modules

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ABSTRACT –

This study looked at multi-grade teaching approaches as well as self-learning modules. A qualitative research approach was employed with 35 respondents; subjects were teachers, grade 8 students, and their parents from Semirara National High School and Tinogboc National High School, who were chosen by purposive sampling. This study looked at multi-grade teaching approaches as well as self-learning modules. A qualitative research approach was employed with 35 respondents; subjects were teachers, grade 8 students, and their parents from Semirara National High School and Tinogboc National High School, who were chosen by purposive sampling. It addresses the integration of practices into self-learning modules during modular distance learning in order to achieve success in the learning continuity that DepEd is pursuing for Filipino learners.

Keywords: *multi- grade teaching practices, little teacher, self- directed learning, peeling off, self- learning modules*

INTRODUCTION

Enhancing the outcomes of education for the benefit of the economy is one of the top priorities of each country across the world. To make this a reality, one of the United Nations' 2030 agenda items for global transformation to sustainable development is to ensure quality education for everyone, inclusively and reasonably, by encouraging lifelong learning opportunities. (Chan, 2021).

With this being said, it would be essential to cite that there are many types of instruction practiced in different schools across the globe. Most of the time, multi-grade teaching is related to children's education in rural, impoverished, and sparsely populated places (Thephavongsa, 2018). According to Ilter (2015), multi-grade teaching is a practice in which students of different ages, skill levels, and class levels continue their education and training together in the same class. One teacher is teaching them for various reasons, such as a lack of teachers, a lack of a school, or a low number of students.

Although multi-grade teaching is not universal, it is widely used in many countries worldwide. In South Africa, for instance, it is not just prevalent in rural areas but even in cities like Gauteng Province. Schools in South Africa are turning to Multi-Grade classes to meet the demand for primary education as a human right for all children. As a developing nation with a large learner population and insufficient human resources to instruct these learners. (Marlise Tredoux, 2020).

Indeed, multi-grade education is considered a valuable instruction that offers many benefits such as increased student cooperation and learning from one another, improved self-regulated learning skills, taking on responsibilities and sharing leadership, increased in-class respect, peer tutoring, and talent learning from upper or lower class lectures. (Gizem Engin, 2018).

Organizing the students into groups is one of the techniques used to manage multigrade classes properly. Flexible grouping strategies are used by MG teachers (Casserly, Tiernan, & Maguire, 2019). Teachers can save time when presenting lessons by grouping the students. Students can also interact with one another. Learning will take place in this manner.

However, teachers of multigrade classes are perceived to have a poor perception of themselves due to various obstacles that place greater demands on them. It is challenging to manage multigrade classes (Rotas & Cahapay, 2020). Some drawbacks to consider include the teacher's heavy workload, lack of time, difficulty in demonstrating individuality to students, problem in planning lessons, oblivious parents, language barriers, a lack of material, and inability to receive in-service training and consultancy. In addition, dealing with non-teaching tasks, failure to comply with environmental conditions, failure to individualize teaching, and failure to gain necessary competency in education can also be noted as challenges.

Meanwhile, mono-grade teaching is the instruction of one grade level by a single teacher at a time. Depending on the number of students, each grade has one or more classes of students. The same teacher teaches all subjects to their class throughout the school year in some primary school systems. Different teachers teach different subjects in other ways. In some scenarios, the same teacher moves from one grade to the next with their class group. In others, the teacher is associated with a specific grade level. (Professor M J Taole, 2016). Similarly, Mulaudzi (2016) claims that teachers in

multi-grade classrooms have a higher burden than teachers in mono-grade classrooms. Teachers in multi-grade classrooms do indeed feel overworked since they are responsible for the work of multiple teachers (Kivunja & Sims, 2015).

Moreover, multi-grade education, also known as multi-grade teaching, has been used in many nations worldwide for many years to meet the aims of Education for All (EFA). According to the report of the EFA project, multi-grade school teaching was considered necessary in providing access to EFA, which was completed in 2015. These practices can help many countries reach the EFA targets and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and national targets (UNESCO, 2015).

Furthermore, as a policy-driven initiative, multi-grade teaching was recently established and implemented in the Maldives' education system (Ministry of Education 2017). A suitable substitute is a multi-grade education. This is true of educational institutions in emerging and even developed countries. This alternative may be cost-effective and efficient to give pupils an excellent education (Bongala et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, multi-grade teaching is not a new notion in today's educational system; instead, it is a strategy to address teacher, facility, and classroom shortages. This mechanism is one of the Department of Education's (DepEd) measures for ensuring that all schools in some distant regions have access to high-quality education.

Indeed, the Elementary Education Act of 1953, Section 4 of Republic Act 896, authorized the establishment of classes with more than two grades apiece. "Where there are insufficient pupils to meet the minimum requirements for creating one grade or two-grade combination courses, the Secretary of Education may permit the organization of such classes by terms established by the Board of National Education," it says.

Thus, faced with various challenges, multi-grade teachers attempted to use coping strategies to deal with their situations. Multi-grade teachers pray, use the internet, manage their time, and practice self-conditioning. Multi-Grade teachers relied heavily on teacher-centered methods (Taole, 2020), shared their resources (Msimanga, 2019), engaged in flexible grouping practices (Casserly, Tiernan, & Maguire, 2019), initiated self-directed learning, peer tutoring, integrated teaching, and having resources in the community, nature, and discarded materials (Mortazavizadeh et al., 2017), and used various strategies such as classroom management, collaborative learning (Napanan & Alinsug, 2021). Teachers believe that the most important method in teaching multi-grade is classroom management because if the educator can control the situation in the classroom, active learning will follow (Rivera, 2017).

This study sought to assist teachers in reflecting on the applicability of multi-grade teaching practices in self-learning modules in the new normal. Different strategies include classroom management, collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, connecting lessons to real life, and integration technology (Napanan & Alinsug, 2021).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore and analyze the multi-grade teaching practices implemented at Sabang II Elementary School to improve education delivery during modular distance learning. Specifically, it seeks to identify the various multi-grade teaching practices used in the school, determine the professional skills developed by teachers through these practices, and examine how Self-Learning Modules (SLMs) are integrated into multi-grade teaching strategies. Additionally, the study will assess the impact of these multi-grade teaching practices on students' academic performance and learning experiences during modular distance learning. Based on the findings, it aims to propose a comprehensive Multi-Grade Teaching and Learning Brochure that serves as a practical guide for teachers, parents, and students, helping to optimize the effectiveness of multi-grade education in modular learning environments.

METHODS

The study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of learners, teachers, and parents involved in modular distance learning. The phenomenological method sought to understand shared experiences and capture the essence of the phenomenon being studied, following Creswell's (2007) five phases of phenomenological research. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with Grade 8 teachers, learners, and parents from Semirara National High School and Tinogboc National High School. These schools were chosen because some of the learners had previous experience with multi-grade methods at Sabang II Elementary School, which had integrated modular distance learning strategies. A total of 35 participants were randomly selected using a combination of probability and purposive sampling methods. Probability sampling ensured that each individual had an equal chance of being selected, thereby minimizing bias and resulting in reliable findings. Purposive sampling identified respondents who could provide rich insights relevant to the research objectives. Interviews with the participants were conducted face-to-face through home visits, while adhering to health protocols. Self-prepared interview guides supported this process. The participants' views were captured using audio and video recordings, along with written transcriptions. Data analysis followed Creswell's qualitative spiral, which involved organizing data, coding, and interpreting it into meaningful themes aligned with the focus of the study. Throughout the research process, all ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and secure handling of data, were prioritized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The multi-grade teaching practices implemented at Sabang II Elementary School are based on three primary strategies: the Little Teacher Strategy, Self-Directed Learning, and the Peeling Off Strategy. The Little Teacher Strategy focuses on peer tutoring and collaborative learning, where advanced students are assigned the role of guiding their classmates. This approach not only supports struggling students but also helps develop leadership skills in the advanced learners. Teachers have noted that this strategy allows students to feel more comfortable asking questions and participating in learning activities since they are interacting with their peers rather than authority figures. For instance, teachers have shared stories of pairing fast learners with those who struggle, which leads to meaningful peer-to-peer learning experiences.

Self-directed learning emerged as a fundamental strategy, empowering students to work independently on tasks aligned with their individual needs and interests. This approach cultivated a sense of responsibility and autonomy among learners. Teachers noted that self-directed learning proved particularly effective in modular distance learning, enabling students to actively engage in their educational journeys. Similarly, the Peeling Off Strategy allowed educators to design activities of increasing complexity, catering to learners at various cognitive levels. This method facilitated differentiated pacing within multi-grade classes, ensuring that all students could progress at a level suited to their abilities. Collectively, these strategies showcased adaptability and effectiveness in a multi-grade environment, even amid the challenges of modular distance learning.

Multi-grade teaching practices have significantly contributed to the development of teachers' professional skills, which can be categorized into four main areas: Communication Skills, Time Management, Organizational Skills, and ICT Competencies. One of the major benefits observed was the improvement of communication skills, as teachers needed to engage regularly with parents, learners, and stakeholders. Teachers reported that they enhanced both their verbal and written communication abilities, such as writing letters for stakeholders and clearly explaining complex module instructions.

Time management skills became essential due to the increased demands of modular learning. Teachers found that by implementing structured schedules, they could manage tasks such as lesson planning, module preparation, and assessments more efficiently. Many noted that creating "to-do lists" and prioritizing their tasks helped them meet deadlines despite their heavy workloads. Additionally, organizational skills improved as teachers learned to systematically manage teaching resources, ensuring that all materials were easily accessible. Proper documentation and organized files saved time and reduced stress, as highlighted by participants who shared their experiences of organizing their modules and Learning Activity Sheets (LAS).

ICT proficiency emerged as a crucial skill that teachers developed, as they increasingly relied on technology for communication, instruction, and preparing educational modules. They highlighted their enhanced ability to use platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and other online tools for teaching and collaboration as a significant area of growth. These skills became especially important during modular distance learning, enabling teachers to effectively support their students' learning.

The integration of Self-Learning Modules (SLMs) into multi-grade teaching practices was successfully achieved through teacher facilitation, the use of technology, home visits, and involvement from stakeholders. Teachers acted as facilitators, guiding students in answering the SLMs while providing additional materials tailored to each learner's needs. Home visits were another important aspect, allowing teachers to monitor students' progress and offer interventions when necessary. Teachers ensured that the SLMs were aligned with learners' cognitive levels, providing clear instructions to promote independent learning. Technology played a significant role, with teachers creating group chats for students and parents to address questions and provide updates. The involvement of stakeholders, including parents, neighbors, and local government units, was crucial for both delivering and collecting modules, especially in remote areas.

Multi-grade teaching practices had a positive impact on learners by fostering independence, confidence, and improved academic skills. The Little Teacher Strategy was particularly valuable during modular learning, as learners took on the role of tutors for their younger siblings or peers. This approach helped build leadership skills and self-esteem, allowing students to become key contributors to their learning communities at home. Another significant outcome was the development of independent learning; students became self-reliant in completing their modules and managing their learning schedules. Teachers observed that learners adapted well to modular distance learning, developing time management skills and maintaining motivation despite challenges.

Parental feedback indicated that many children became self-sufficient, needing minimal assistance at home and even helping their siblings with schoolwork. Additionally, students demonstrated improved reading comprehension and confidence, especially through peer-led learning and collaborative activities. However, challenges were identified, including difficulties with major subjects like math, complex module instructions, and limited resources, which served as barriers to learning. In response, teachers and stakeholders collaborated to address these issues by revising activities, providing tutorials, and ensuring access to supplementary learning materials.

Despite achieving notable successes, teachers encountered significant challenges such as limited resources, conceptual errors in learning modules, and difficulties in monitoring and assessing students' progress. To address these issues, the study proposed a Multi-Grade Teaching Guide, designed as a comprehensive resource for teachers, parents, and learners. This guide aims to enhance collaboration, tackle the challenges of modular learning, and sustain the benefits of multi-grade teaching practices even in post-pandemic settings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study emphasize the significance of multi-grade teaching practices at Sabang II Elementary School in optimizing learning opportunities, encouraging collaboration with parents, and catering to the diverse needs of students. These practices not only have a positive effect on students' academic growth and development, particularly through the use of Self-Learning Modules (SLMs), but also offer valuable opportunities for teachers to improve their professional skills, including communication, time management, and instructional planning. Despite the challenges associated with modular distance learning, the effectiveness of multi-grade teaching practices has shown a broad range of positive impacts on the teaching and learning experience. Additionally, the proposed multi-grade teaching guide has the potential to serve as a practical resource for enhancing teachers' professional development, strengthening parental involvement, and improving student outcomes.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that the Modular Learning Brochure be widely distributed through meetings, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, seminars, and conferences to encourage adoption among both novice and experienced teachers. Teachers should integrate Self-Learning Modules (SLMs) into their multi-grade teaching strategies to enhance their professional skills and improve educational delivery. School leaders are encouraged to adopt and promote best practices in multi-grade teaching by providing mentoring support to teachers, parents, and learners to ensure the success of modular distance learning. Furthermore, the documented best practices in multi-grade teaching should be evaluated for their effectiveness and compiled into the modular learning brochure. This resource will serve as a valuable guide and reference for teachers, parents, and learners, fostering continuous improvement in teaching strategies and educational outcomes.

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