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Teacher to Multi-Grade School Leader: An Exploration of Work Adjustment Among Newly Appointed School Heads

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ABSTRACT:

The transition from teacher to school principal represents a profound professional and personal shift, especially within the unique context of multi-grade schools. This qualitative study examined the work adjustment experiences of newly appointed school heads as they transitioned into leadership roles that required both instructional guidance and administrative management. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the research uncovered the multifaceted challenges these leaders faced, including role ambiguity, increased workloads, and limited access to leadership training tailored for multi-grade environments. Despite these obstacles, many principals demonstrated resilience by drawing on peer support, prior teaching experience, and a deep commitment to student learning. The findings also highlighted the crucial role of mentorship, clear role expectations, and targeted professional development in facilitating a smoother adjustment process. Ultimately, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers, training institutions, and educational leaders seeking to enhance leadership preparation and support systems—ensuring a smoother transition for future school leaders and fostering more effective leadership in multi-grade school settings.

Keywords: *school leadership, work adjustment, school performance*

Introduction:

Transitioning from a classroom teacher to a school principal presents complex challenges that demand a shift in professional identity and the acquisition of new leadership competencies. As noted by Bush (2022), newly appointed school leaders face a steep learning curve in navigating school management, stakeholder engagement, and decision-making under pressure. This transition becomes even more demanding in multi-grade schools, where leaders must address diverse student needs with limited resources, balance teaching and management roles, and manage high workloads—all with minimal professional development tailored to these unique contexts (Taole et al., 2024). According to Özdemir, Çoban, and Bozkurt (2020), effective school leaders must demonstrate 21st-century skills, including strategic thinking, adaptability, and digital literacy. As school heads begin their leadership journey, they are tasked with supporting teachers, motivating staff, and fostering student growth, all while ensuring school performance. Gamala et al. (2022) stress that strong administrative abilities and a supportive school environment are essential to school success. This research aims to capture not just the logistical but also the human side of this professional transformation. The study, *From Teacher to Leader: An Exploration of Work Adjustment for Newly Hired School Heads*, examines the lived experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and support mechanisms of these leaders. It seeks to contribute meaningful insights that can guide policy, improve training programs, and create onboarding systems that ensure a smoother transition for future school heads—especially in multi-grade contexts. The background of this study rests on the premise that effective leadership significantly influences school performance. As highlighted by Austin (2020), strategic planning enables leaders to align goals and resources for school improvement. Instructional leadership is particularly vital, as noted by Kilag and Sasan (2023), with He et al. (2024) affirming its role in enhancing teaching practices. The managerial competencies of school heads—such as planning, communication, and decision-making—are key in fostering a positive learning environment that drives academic achievement. To understand this leadership transition more fully, the study is anchored on a conceptual framework that integrates instructional and distributed leadership theories. As observed by Ma and Marion (2021), instructional leadership strengthens teacher efficacy and student outcomes, while Sims et al. (2025) emphasize the value of high-quality, ongoing professional development. Jaca (2021) further highlights the challenges of transitioning into leadership roles, reinforcing the need for targeted capacity-building efforts. Research by Carter Jr. (2021) and Hickey et al. (2022) also underscores the importance of distributed and culturally responsive leadership in creating inclusive, high-performing school cultures. Moreover, strategic leadership and resource management play a critical role. Ferrero and Salles-Filho (2025) advocate for efficient budgeting to maximize limited resources, while Ajmi (2024) and Alainati et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of transformational leadership in driving national education reforms. In stakeholder management, understanding emotional, normative, and cognitive factors is key, as outlined by Parmar et al. (2010) and Mitchell et al. (1997), both of whom offer frameworks for sustaining productive partnerships. Ultimately, Sims et al. (2025) argue that leadership development must be ongoing, contextualized, and rigorously evaluated to produce meaningful improvements in teaching and learning. This study thus hopes to inform the design of effective leadership preparation and support systems, ultimately enhancing not only leadership practices but the broader educational experiences of school leaders, teachers, and students alike. Teachers appointed as school heads in multi-grade schools face dual roles, balancing instruction across multiple

grade levels with administrative duties such as budgeting, staff supervision, and policy implementation—often in resource-limited, rural areas (Bøje et al., 2021). This complex setup demands resilience, adaptability, and community engagement, especially where professional support is scarce. Effective leadership directly influences school culture and student outcomes. MacLeod (2020) and Aquino et al. (2021) emphasize that instructional leadership promotes both academic achievement and teacher development, though leadership must be tailored to multigrade contexts. Multigrade leaders need professional development aligned to their unique challenges (Rondero & Casupanan, 2024; Bua & Martin, 2020), while Emiru et al. (2020) stress leadership as a driver of continuous improvement. Transformational and values-based leadership styles—marked by collaboration, recognition, and innovation—are linked to improved school culture and performance (Swen, 2020; Atasoy, 2020; Kouzes et al., 2023; Leithwood et al., 2021). Leadership transitions also reflect a sense of calling and civic duty, which supports leader persistence despite institutional constraints (Swen, 2020). Bailey et al. (2020) highlight that international school principals face unique demands, including cultural adaptation and stakeholder engagement, reinforcing the need for tailored leadership preparation. Likewise, effective school leadership, particularly among marginalized groups, requires high expectations and a supportive environment (Edmonds, 2020; Stronge et al., 2021). Management competencies—strategic planning, supervision, and communication—enhance teacher and school performance (Komalasari et al., 2020; Kartini et al., 2020). Tools like Tobón et al.'s (2020) leadership rubric and educator certification (Rusilowati et al., 2020) contribute to professional growth and effective evaluation. Institutional and contextual factors remain crucial. Pont (2020) and Acton (2021) discuss leadership policy reforms and challenges faced by principals as change agents, while Noman et al. (2020) call for contextually responsive leadership in culturally diverse schools. In multi-grade classrooms, strategies such as the LEPO model (Msimanga, 2020) and differentiated instruction (Khanal, 2022; Fatima et al., 2024) enhance outcomes, though increased workloads remain a barrier (Qayoom et al., 2024; Naparan et al., 2021). Resource inequality severely affects rural school effectiveness (Linake et al., 2023; Reyes et al., 2023). School heads in these areas often lack training and support, limiting their capacity to lead effectively (Taole et al., 2024; Bua & Martin, 2020). Innovations in curriculum management (Mthethwa et al., 2023), leadership development (Calaycay & Moneva, 2021), and policy sustainability (Novianti, 2022) are critical. Lastly, the COVID-19 crisis amplified leadership burdens, requiring adaptive policy responses (Fotheringham et al., 2022).

Methodology:

Research Design

To investigate the experiences, challenges, and strategies of newly hired school heads in multi-grade schools, this study employed a qualitative research methodology. This approach was particularly well-suited for exploring the complex realities and subjective experiences of school heads as they navigated their leadership adjustment period. As described by Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research involves "an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon, where the researcher collects data in a natural setting, using words, images, or narratives, and interprets the meanings that participants assign to their lived experiences." Through this lens, the study aimed to gain rich, contextual insights into how school heads make sense of their new roles and the strategies they use to overcome the unique challenges of multi-grade leadership.

Respondents of the Study

This study involved 8 newly appointed school heads from multi-grade schools in the first district of Quezon Province, all of whom had assumed their roles within the last two years. Their selection aimed to capture recent and context-specific insights into the unique challenges of leadership adjustment in multi-grade educational settings.

Population and Sampling Technique

This study employed purposeful sampling to select school heads who could provide relevant insights into the adjustment experiences of leading multi-grade classrooms. Eligible participants were those who had been in their positions for less than two years and were managing classrooms with multiple grade levels.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with newly appointed principals in multi-grade schools, allowing for both consistency and flexibility in exploring their experiences. This approach enabled participants to share in-depth insights into their work adjustment, challenges, and strategies in alignment with the study's objectives.

Research Instrument

The semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore the full range of experiences of newly hired school heads in multi-grade schools. It focused on key areas such as initial challenges, support systems, relationship building, classroom management, work-life balance, perceptions of success, and suggestions for improvement.

Research Procedure

This study utilized thematic analysis to examine qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with newly appointed principals in multi-grade schools. Following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase framework—familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing, defining, and reporting—the analysis identified key themes such as managing dual roles, coping with limited resources, and seeking peer support. NVivo software may have supported the coding process. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in uncovering patterns within complex personal narratives, allowing for a deep

understanding of the school heads' adjustment experiences. Findings were illustrated with direct quotes and interpreted within relevant educational leadership literature.

Results

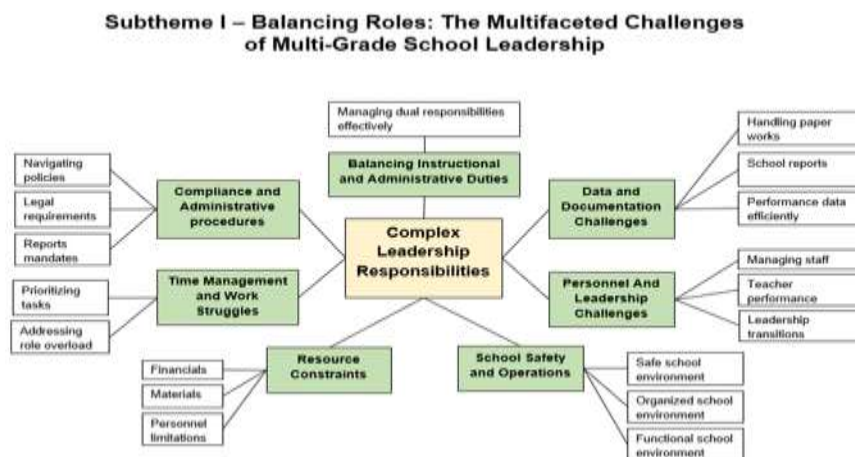
Table 1. List of Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Years Service	In School
School Head A	Female	53	3	San Jose Elementary School
School Head B	Male	51	2	Sto. Niño Elementary School
School Head C	Female	38	2	Cagbalete I Elementary School
School Head D	Male	35	1	Remedios II Elementary School
School Head E	Male	54	3	Cagsiay III Annex Elementary School
School Head F	Female	37	3	Rosario Elementary School
School Head G	Female	32	3	Caldong Resettlement Elementary School
School Head H	Female	38	3	Alupay Elementary School

Most school heads in the study had been in their roles for one to three years, indicating they were still adjusting to leadership in multi-grade settings. Despite limited experience, they showed strong commitment and adaptability in managing complex responsibilities. As Hidari (2021) notes, effective leadership is vital in multi-grade schools, requiring both instructional support and resource management. Interviews revealed key challenges such as limited resources and overlapping duties, highlighting the need for hands-on training, mentoring, and practice-based leadership development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Such preparation equips school heads to navigate their dual roles effectively and drive school improvement.

Figure 1.

Balancing Roles: The Multifaceted Challenges of Multi-Grade School Leadership



Newly hired school heads in multi-grade schools face the dual challenge of managing both instructional and administrative tasks, often under resource constraints and poor infrastructure. As noted by Taole et al. (2024) and Bonsol et al. (2025), these roles require adaptability, time management, and strategic leadership. Respondents highlighted issues like limited internet access, overwhelming workloads, and the difficulty of shifting from teaching to leadership roles. Despite these challenges, they demonstrate resilience and persistence, using reflective practice and collaboration to manage their responsibilities. Strong leadership, effective resource allocation, and policy support are essential to help them succeed in such demanding environments.

Figure 2.

Balancing Instruction and Administration: Leadership Challenges in Multi-Grade Schools

Subtheme II - Balancing Instruction and Administration: Leadership Challenges in Multi-Grade Schools

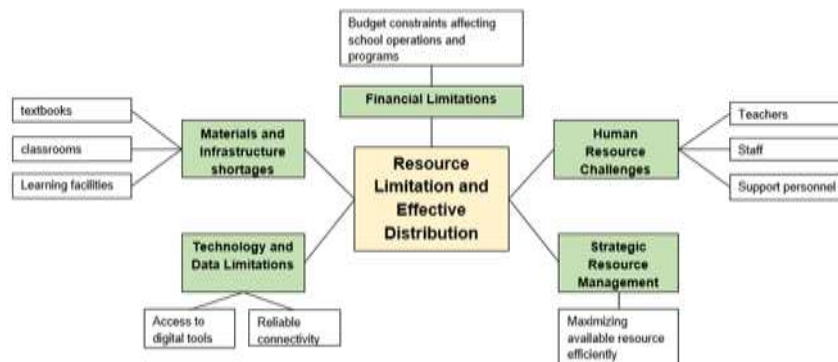


Balancing instructional leadership and administrative duties is a major challenge for school heads in multi-grade schools. Studies by Mumba (2022), Bonsol et al. (2025), and Rondero et al. (2024) confirm that effective leadership impacts teacher performance and student learning, particularly in resource-limited and complex settings. Respondents noted that their previous teaching experience helps them relate to training, supervise instruction effectively, and support teachers in adapting to multi-grade classrooms. They emphasized flexible lesson planning, strong questioning techniques, and focusing on foundational skills like reading and numeracy—key strategies in managing instructional and administrative demands.

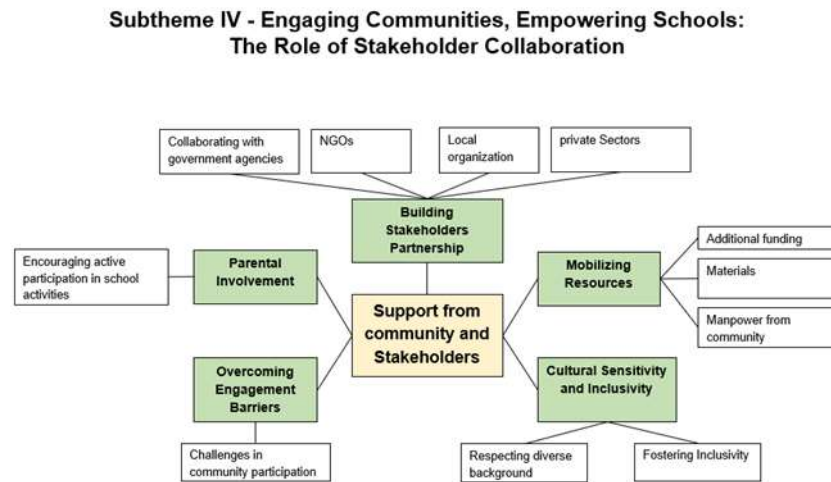
Figure 3.

Strategic Resource Management: Addressing Constraints in Multi-Grade Schools

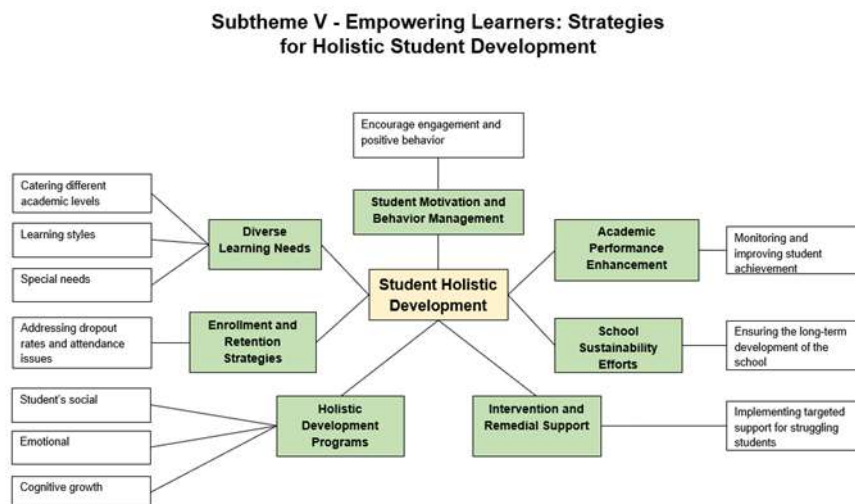
Subtheme III - Strategic Resource Management: Addressing Constraints in Multi-Grade Schools



In multi-grade schools, strategic resource management is a vital leadership competency, especially for newly hired school heads facing limited staff, materials, and infrastructure. Leaders must adopt innovative and community-driven approaches to ensure quality education despite persistent constraints. Studies by Bongala et al. (2020), Rondero and Casupanan (2024), and Taole et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of instructional leadership, adaptive strategies, and institutional support in addressing resource challenges, while Navarro (2024) and Muliati et al. (2022) highlight the role of policy reform and efficient resource planning in improving school outcomes. Respondents shared experiences such as using LGU-funded Learning Facilitators during teacher absences, receiving immediate barangay support for materials, and successfully lobbying for new classrooms—practices that align with findings from Naparan and Castañeda (2021), Alipour et al. (2023), and Shareefa et al. (2021), who underscore the impact of community engagement and localized planning. These accounts demonstrate that effective leadership in multi-grade settings involves resourcefulness, collaboration, and shared responsibility to sustain teaching, learning, and school improvement.

Figure 4.*Engaging Communities, Empowering Schools: The Role of Stakeholder Collaboration*

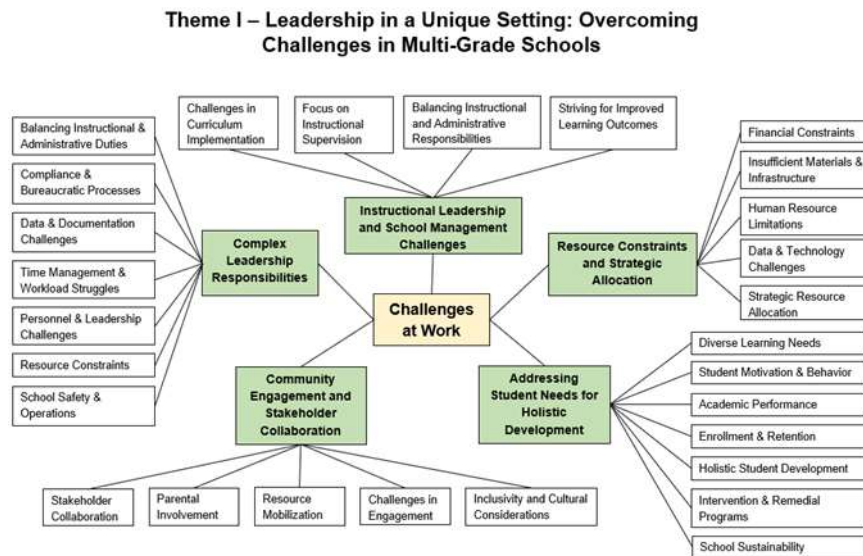
In multi-grade schools, strong collaboration with stakeholders—including local government units (LGUs), barangay leaders, parents, and private sector partners—is essential for addressing resource gaps, managing teacher shortages, and improving infrastructure. As supported by Cabrillos (2024), Arfa (2024), Alkaher and Gan (2020), and Penuel et al. (2020), stakeholder engagement empowers schools, fosters sustainability, and enhances educational outcomes. Interview responses affirmed that harmonious relationships with the community are critical, as stakeholders often provide donations, project support, and fill resource gaps not covered by the school's budget. Respondents shared how barangay leaders respond quickly to urgent needs, and LGUs provide Learning Facilitators to maintain instructional continuity. These collaborative efforts ease the burdens of school heads, enable localized problem-solving, and reinforce the importance of shared responsibility in sustaining quality education in resource-limited multi-grade settings.

Figure 5.*Empowering Learners: Strategies for Holistic Student Development*

Empowering learners in multi-grade schools requires a holistic approach that nurtures academic, emotional, social, and physical growth despite limited resources and complex teaching environments. Key strategies include student-centered interventions, differentiated instruction, and life skills programs that promote resilience, motivation, and inclusive learning. Studies by Cozza (2023), Masebe, and Saifuddin et al. (2024) affirm that flexible, context-responsive strategies improve student engagement and learning outcomes, especially in multi-age or rural settings. School heads and teachers demonstrate adaptability by using traditional materials, aligning PPAs with division initiatives, and relying on Learning Facilitators to maintain instructional continuity. Community-driven efforts like Project 5Ps boost enrollment and retention through parental support and local engagement. Interview responses underscore the value of creative planning, strategic partnerships, and a strong commitment to equity in education. Ultimately, empowering learners in multi-grade schools reflects a leadership approach rooted in persistence, collaboration, and innovation to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Figure 6.

Leading in a unique setting: overcoming challenges in multi-grade schools



Leading in multi-grade school settings presents distinct and complex challenges that demand adaptability, resilience, and a deep commitment to instructional leadership. Newly appointed school heads often face the dual responsibilities of teaching and administration, compounded by limited resources, diverse student needs, and heightened community expectations. Unlike traditional schools, multi-grade classrooms require differentiated instruction and flexible management, as highlighted in studies by Thaba-Nkadamime (2020), Shareefa et al. (2021), and Taole et al. (2024), all of which emphasize the need for targeted policy support and professional development. Respondents in this study echoed these findings, describing their experiences balancing multiple roles, overcoming misconceptions about leadership ease, and relying on strong community ties and collaboration to navigate day-to-day demands. Some, like Respondent 1 and Respondent 2, shared how prior teaching experience in multi-grade settings eased their instructional supervision, while others, like Respondent 3 and Respondent 5, noted the overwhelming administrative load they hadn't anticipated. Despite these challenges, their determination to lead, improve, and adapt shines through, revealing a unique kind of leadership that thrives on flexibility, creativity, and a commitment to student and school development. Table 2 further affirms that multi-grade school heads grapple with five core areas—leadership, instruction, resources, community involvement, and learner development—all of which require continuous support, collaboration, and innovative strategies to ensure equitable and effective education.

Table 2.

Challenges at work in leading a multi-grade school

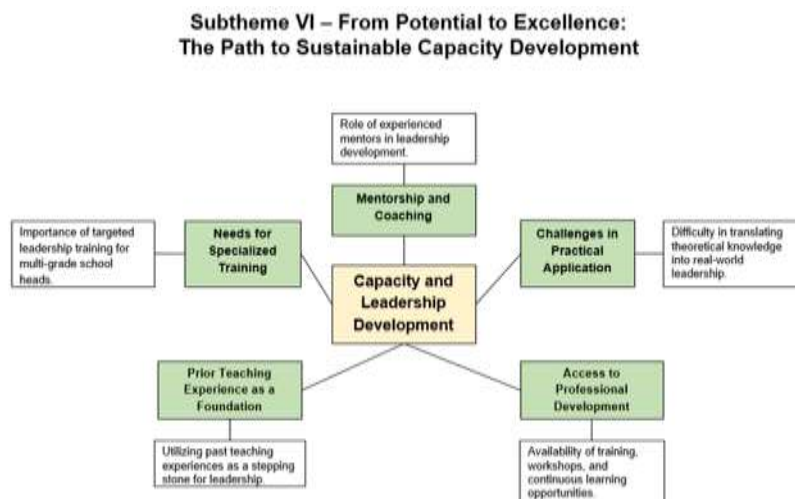
Codes	Clustered Meaning
Multifaceted Leadership Responsibilities in Multi-Grade Schools	Balancing Instructional & Administrative Duties (5) Compliance & Bureaucratic Processes (6) Data & Documentation Challenges (4) Time Management & Workload Struggles (7) Personnel & Leadership Challenges (4) Resource Constraints (4) School Safety & Operations (3)
Leadership Challenges to Enhance Instructional Quality and School Management	Focus on Instructional Supervision (5) Challenges in Curriculum Implementation (4) Balancing Instructional and Administrative Responsibilities (4) Striving for Improved Learning Outcomes (4)
Resource Limitations in Multi-Grade School Leadership	Financial Constraints (5) Insufficient Materials & Infrastructure (4)

	Human Resource Limitations (3)
	Data & Technology Challenges (3)
	Strategic Resource Allocation (4)
Community Engagement for Inclusive and Sustainable School Development	Stakeholder Collaboration (5)
	Parental Involvement (4)
	Resource Mobilization (3)
	Challenges in Engagement (4)
	Inclusivity and Cultural Considerations (4)
Inclusive and Sustainable Education for Holistic Student Development	Diverse Learning Needs (6)
	Student Motivation & Behavior (3)
	Academic Performance (4)
	Enrollment & Retention (3)
	Holistic Student Development (5)
	Intervention & Remedial Programs (7)
	School Sustainability (6)

The challenges faced by school heads in multi-grade schools, as shown in Table 1, are supported by several studies. Taole (2022) and Cansoy et al. (2024) highlight the complex leadership and resource management demands in rural multi-grade settings. Calaycay and Moneva (2021) emphasize that effective instructional leadership enhances teacher performance despite limited resources and time. Karadag (2020) reinforces the link between strong leadership and student achievement, while Cozza (2023) illustrates how teachers adapt to diverse learning needs and infrastructure gaps—further reflecting the key issues outlined in the table.

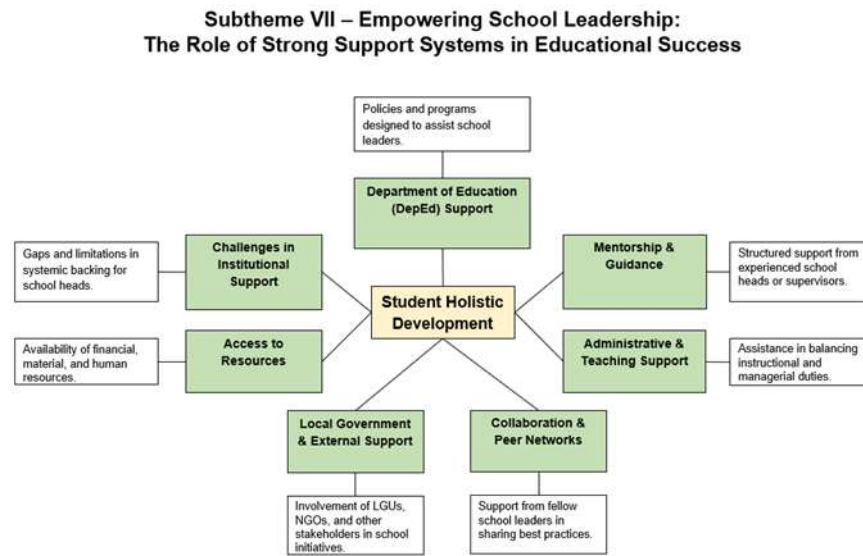
Figure 7.

From Potential to Excellence: The Path to Sustainable Capacity Development



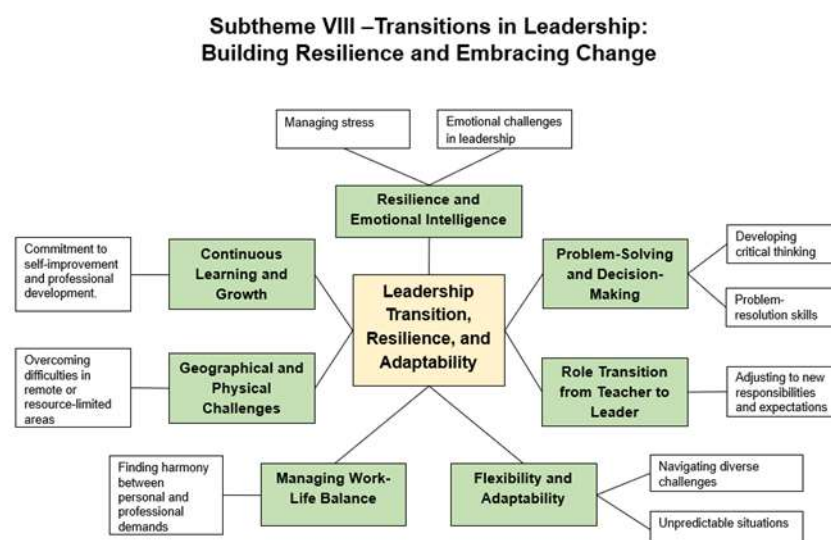
This section explores sustainable capacity development for newly appointed school heads in multi-grade schools, emphasizing the importance of mentorship, practical coaching, and continuous professional development. As noted by Toh et al. (2022), structured mentoring significantly shapes leadership identity, while Faizuddin et al. (2022) stress the value of ongoing training in equipping leaders with modern competencies. Karam Hussain and Jamil (2021) highlight the need for tailored programs specific to school heads' roles. Respondents echo these points, citing mentorship from experienced leaders as a key support in navigating leadership duties. They also acknowledge the difficulty of applying idealistic policies to real-world school management, especially when burdened with multiple roles. Learning from past leadership experiences, both positive and negative, and applying lessons from training programs like PESPA are seen as essential to leadership growth. Overall, these insights underscore the need for context-based, experience-driven, and continuous learning to support sustainable leadership in multi-grade settings.

Figure 8.

Empowering School Leadership: The Role of Strong Support Systems in Educational Success

Empowering school leadership is key to educational success, especially when supported by mentorship, collaboration, and access to resources. Studies by Melloria and Gaylo (2024), Alvarez and Delavin (2022), and Swaminathan and Reed (2020) stress the value of mentorship in shaping effective leadership, particularly for newly appointed school heads. Klar et al. (2020) and Pont (2020) highlight the importance of leadership coaching and supportive policies, especially in rural contexts. Meyer et al. (2023) and Öngel and Tabancali (2022) emphasize that collaborative leadership fosters teacher cooperation and positive school culture. Interview data support these findings, revealing that school heads value strong administrative support, proper fund utilization, and shared responsibilities among staff. Respondents also shared that observing best practices from other schools, fostering parent engagement, and maintaining effective PPAs help them manage schools more efficiently. Despite challenges, school heads show adaptability, resourcefulness, and commitment to inclusive and collaborative leadership. These qualities, combined with emotional intelligence and continuous learning, are vital for sustaining improvement and building a successful school environment.

Figure 9.

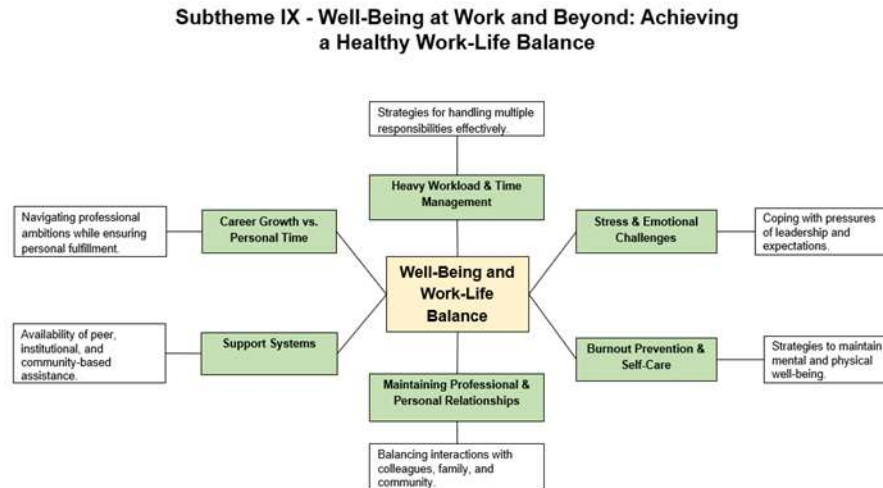
Transitions in Leadership: Building Resilience and Embracing Change

Leadership transitions in multi-grade schools demand adaptability, resilience, and a shift in mindset—from classroom instruction to leading an entire school community. Research underscores the importance of transformational leadership, professional resilience, and job satisfaction in navigating change (Kaya, 2024; Zadok et al., 2024), along with adaptability and digital fluency (De Los Reyes & Paglinawan, 2024). The need for holistic support, including work-life balance and a positive organizational climate, is also emphasized (Carpio & Cruz, 2025). Interview responses reflect these findings: newly appointed school heads face challenges such as supervising teachers, managing resources, and supporting staff emotionally. Professional development through LAC sessions and specialized training like the National Training for Multigrade Leadership help build competence. Despite barriers like remote

locations and long travel distances, school heads demonstrate strong leadership by fostering teamwork, understanding individual differences, and maintaining emotional strength. Ultimately, transitioning into school leadership requires not just new skills, but also a deep commitment to inclusive, supportive, and learner-centered practices.

Figure 10.

Well-Being at Work and Beyond: Achieving a Healthy Work-Life Balance



This section offers a deep dive into the lived experiences of newly appointed school heads in multi-grade schools, focusing on their work adjustments, leadership strategies, and the interplay between professional duties and personal responsibilities. Through thematic analysis and supporting literature, it becomes clear that the demanding nature of multi-grade leadership often leads to burnout and emotional fatigue (Buruck et al., 2020; Koçak et al., 2024). However, studies also highlight the buffering effect of career engagement and purpose (Desiatco et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2023), as well as the importance of social and institutional support systems like mentoring and LAC sessions (Inggamara et al., 2022; Obina et al., 2024). Respondents shared how constant updates from supervisors, though helpful, can add pressure, while juggling roles as teacher, leader, parent, and spouse often results in stress and confusion. Emotional labor, lack of role clarity, and the absence of compensation further impact their well-being, as reflected in metaphors like “having many faces” and sacrificing weekends for unpaid duties. These insights underscore the urgent need for better boundary-setting, targeted support, and recognition of the complex realities faced by multi-grade school heads.

Figure 11.

Leading with Integrity: Ethical Leadership in Policy Implementation

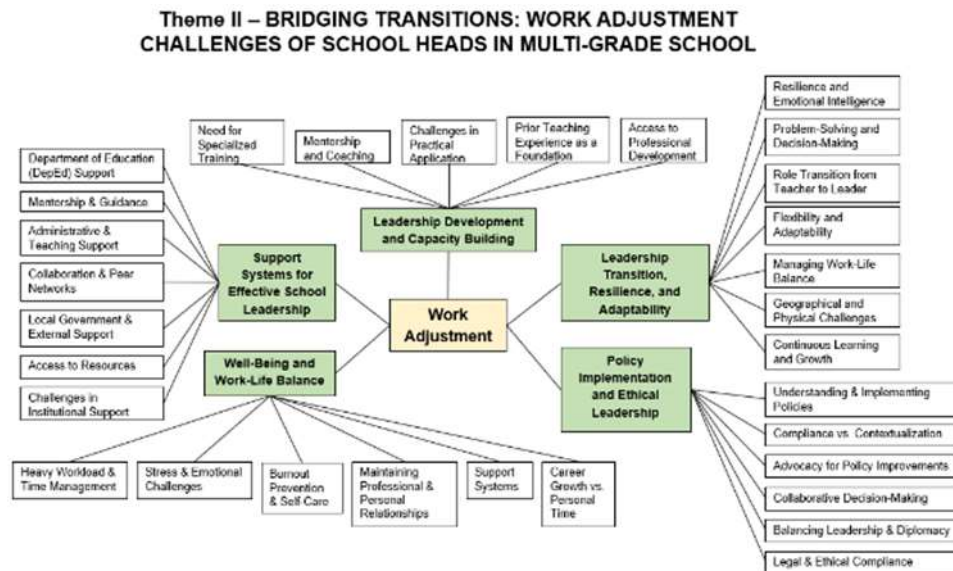


For school heads in multi-grade settings, ethical leadership and effective policy implementation are essential in navigating the complexities of their roles. Balancing policy compliance with the need to contextualize guidelines for diverse classrooms requires both strategic thinking and compassion. As supported by Genciana et al. (2024), Manolong et al. (2024), and Gobuyan et al. (2024), school heads must not only implement policies but also advocate for improvements, involving stakeholders in collaborative decisions to ensure relevance and fairness. Ethical leadership, as highlighted by Mutuma (2024) and Ahmad et al. (2021), fosters trust, transparency, and inclusivity—qualities vital in leading diverse and often under-resourced schools. Interview

responses reflect this balance between adherence and empathy; for instance, Respondent 4 likens the school head's role to a nurturing mother who leads with both rules and heart, while Respondent 2 emphasizes that decisions must benefit all stakeholders, especially learners and teachers. Meanwhile, Respondent 6 demonstrates goal-driven leadership by reviving and realigning Programs, Projects, and Activities (PPAs) to foster clarity and ownership among staff. These insights underscore that leadership in multi-grade schools involves more than executing directives—it demands ethical discernment, emotional intelligence, and a deep commitment to serving both policy and people.

Figure 12.

Bridging Transitions: Work Adjustment Challenges of School Heads in Multi-grade School



Based on the interview responses, school heads in multi-grade schools face five key work adjustment challenges: leadership development and capacity building, leadership transition, resilience and adaptability, policy implementation and ethical leadership, and well-being and work-life balance. These leaders emphasize the need for ongoing professional growth through training, mentorship, and experiential learning, as their initial preparation focused on teaching rather than school management. As shown in various accounts, the challenges of managing both instructional and administrative tasks, navigating remote locations with limited internet access, and balancing family and work responsibilities demand resilience and adaptability. Effective leadership also involves ethical decision-making, contextualizing policies, and promoting a collaborative and inclusive school environment. Interviewees described the importance of specialized training for multi-grade contexts, proactive problem-solving in overcoming technological barriers, and drawing strength from support systems such as colleagues, mentors, and central office initiatives. Their lived experiences highlight the necessity of emotional intelligence, community engagement, and shared leadership to navigate the complex roles of school heads. Ultimately, the findings underscore that sustainable success in multi-grade schools requires empowered, well-trained, and resilient leaders who value collaboration, ethical leadership, and a deep commitment to the well-being of both learners and teachers.

Table 3.

Work adjustment encounter by school heads in multi-grade school.

Codes	Clustered Meaning
Leadership Capacity, Training and Mentorship	Need for Specialized Training (6)
	Mentorship and Coaching (4)
	Challenges in Practical Application (5)
	Prior Teaching Experience as a Foundation (4)
	Access to Professional Development (5)
Support Systems for Effective School Leadership	Department of Education (DepEd) Support (5)
	Mentorship & Guidance (5)
	Administrative & Teaching Support (3)
	Collaboration & Peer Networks (4)

Leadership Transitions with Resilience and Adaptability	Local Government & External Support (2)
	Access to Resources (2)
	Challenges in Institutional Support (3)
	Resilience and Emotional Intelligence (4)
	Problem-Solving and Decision-Making (3)
	Role Transition from Teacher to Leader (4)
	Flexibility and Adaptability (3)
	Managing Work-Life Balance (6)
	Geographical and Physical Challenges (4)
	Continuous Learning and Growth (3)
Well-Being and Work-Life Balance	Heavy Workload & Time Management (5)
	Stress & Emotional Challenges (4)
	Burnout Prevention & Self-Care (3)
	Maintaining Professional & Personal Relationships (2)
	Support Systems (2)
Policy Implementation and Ethical Leadership	Career Growth vs. Personal Time (2)
	Understanding & Implementing Policies (5)
	Compliance vs. Contextualization (3)
	Advocacy for Policy Improvements (3)
	Collaborative Decision-Making (2)
	Balancing Leadership & Diplomacy (2)
	Legal & Ethical Compliance (2)

Newly appointed school heads in multi-grade schools face complex transitions from teaching to leadership, requiring emotional resilience, ethical decision-making, and strong support systems. While their teaching background helps, they need specialized training and mentorship to manage policy implementation and diverse responsibilities. Ethical leadership, as emphasized by scholars, fosters trust and adaptability—crucial in navigating the challenges of multi-grade school management.

Figure 13.

Balancing Roles: The Multifaceted Challenges of Multi-Grade School Leadership



Leading a multi-grade school is a complex role that requires school heads to juggle multiple responsibilities—serving as administrators, instructional leaders, and sometimes even classroom teachers. With limited resources and staff, they often face work overload, decision fatigue, and blurred role boundaries. As noted by Taole et al. (2024) and Galope, these leaders manage diverse learner needs while also mentoring teachers and handling community relations. Studies by Jakachira et al. (2023) and Mataboge (2024) highlight the lack of preparation and systemic support, especially in rural or satellite schools, which intensifies the burden. Interview responses reflect that school heads manage these challenges through adaptability, a growth mindset, and reliance on available training, mentorship, and clear policy guidance like RA 9155. They stress the importance of continuous learning, distributing responsibilities fairly, and fostering a collaborative, respectful school environment that supports both student success and teacher well-being.

Figure 14.

From Learning to Leading: A Pathway to Professional and Leadership Excellence



The journey from learning to leading is a transformative process marked by growth, purpose, and continuous development. In education, this shift requires more than assuming a new role—it demands adaptability, resilience, and a commitment to lifelong learning. As supported by studies such as those by Morimoto and Baguio (2025), Gul et al. (2022), and Makuachukwu (2023), professional development plays a vital role in nurturing leadership identity and effectiveness. These findings align with the experiences of newly appointed school heads, who emphasized the need for practical training, mentorship, and relationship-building to navigate their roles. Respondents shared how their leadership journey began with uncertainty but gradually evolved into purposeful engagement, marked by a deeper understanding of their responsibilities and a desire to lead with integrity. They also stressed the value of workshops and hands-on training in bridging the gap between theory and real-world application. This transition, as reflected in both literature and lived experiences, illustrates that sustainable school leadership emerges not from position alone, but from a continuous cycle of reflection, development, and a genuine commitment to educational change.

Figure 15.

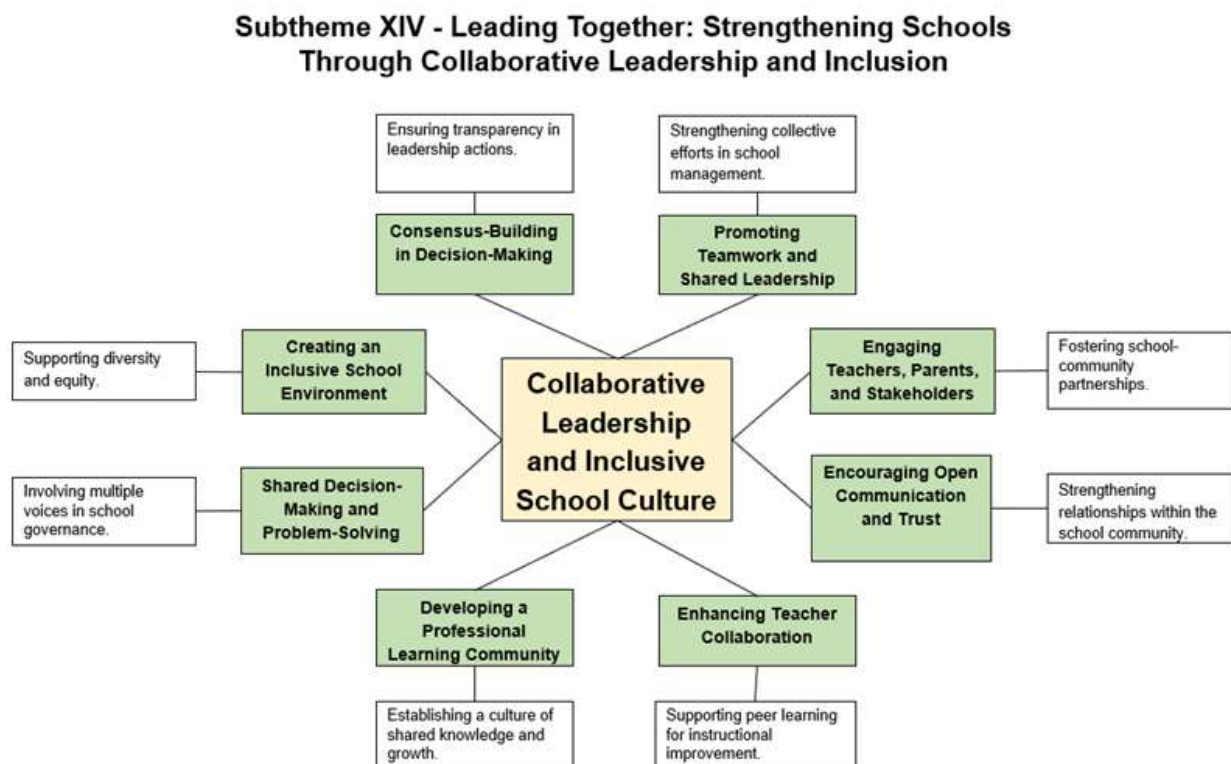
Leading for the Future: Sustainable Leadership and Governance in Schools



Sustainable leadership and effective governance are essential for building adaptive, inclusive, and resilient schools that foster long-term success. These principles are grounded in continuous professional development, ethical decision-making, and shared leadership. Studies by Morimoto and Bagoio (2025), Gul et al. (2022), and Makuachukwu (2023) affirm that participative and teacher-driven development enhances leadership identity and empowers educators to lead collaboratively. Likewise, Brauckmann et al. (2023) stress the importance of aligning leadership strategies with contextual needs. These insights are echoed in the experiences of school heads, who emphasized the need for adaptability, reflection, and teamwork. Respondent 2 highlighted the role of experiential learning and trial-and-error in adapting strategies to school-specific contexts, while Respondent 6 emphasized collaborative planning, persistence, and the value of support systems like COS personnel. Together, their reflections underscore how sustainable leadership is not about perfection, but about continuous improvement, resilience, and fostering a culture where all stakeholders are engaged in the shared mission of school improvement.

Figure 16.

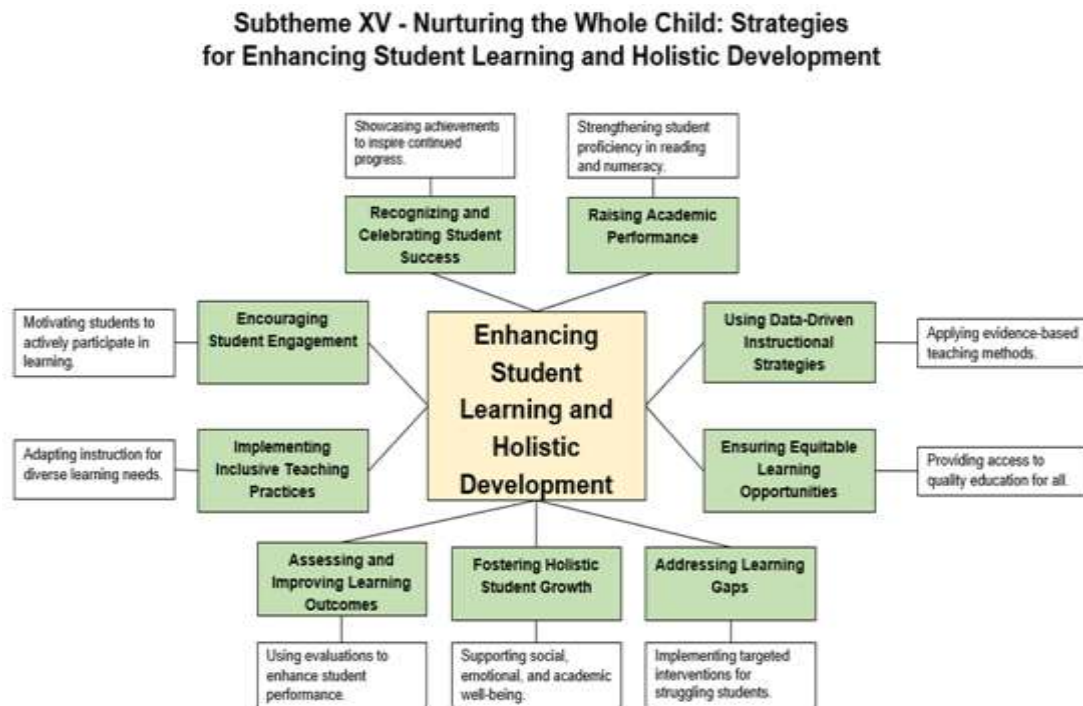
Leading Together: Strengthening Schools Through Collaborative Leadership and Inclusion



Collaborative leadership plays a crucial role in fostering inclusive, transparent, and supportive school environments where all stakeholders—teachers, staff, students, parents, and the broader community—work together toward shared goals. As supported by studies like Óskarsdóttir et al. (2020) and Yıldız (2021), inclusive and collaborative leadership enhances student outcomes, particularly for diverse learners, by promoting mutual respect and a sense of shared responsibility. DeMatthews et al. (2020) and Ansell et al. (2020) further stress that leadership preparation and collaborative governance are essential for inclusive decision-making and effective school improvement. These principles are echoed in the voices of school heads who prioritize empathy, transparency, and heart-led service. Respondent 4 underscores the importance of shaping students into kind and socially aware individuals, while Respondent 6 highlights the value of working with purpose and passion to make a meaningful impact. Respondents 1 and 7 emphasize transparency, community engagement, and resourcefulness as core elements of effective leadership. Together, these insights reflect how collaborative leadership strengthens school communities and nurtures a culture of collective success.

Figure 17.

Nurturing the Whole Child: Strategies for Enhancing Student Learning and Holistic Development



In multi-grade schools, fostering holistic student development is a core priority, requiring school heads and teachers to support not just academic learning but also the emotional, social, and physical growth of their learners. Research by Ramaila (2025), Habimana Ingabire, and others affirms the value of nurturing approaches and inclusive school environments that promote socio-emotional learning, differentiated instruction, and a culture of care—strategies particularly vital in multi-grade settings. Nolan et al. (2021) and Rani et al. (2023) highlight how such positive school cultures enhance well-being and academic outcomes, while Adams et al. (2022) and Datnow et al. (2022) underscore the role of effective leadership in sustaining this balance. Bendini and Devercelli (2022) further point to the importance of quality early learning in fostering long-term success. These findings echo the reflections of respondents, such as respondent 6, who draws motivation from serving students' best interests, and respondent 7, who emphasizes that school leadership must come from genuine vocation and selfless dedication. The formation of Theme III – *Dreams and Determination: The Leadership Aspirations of Multi-Grade School Heads* – captures this collective vision, shaped by subthemes of balancing diverse roles, growing through learning, leading for sustainability, fostering inclusion, and nurturing the whole child. This theme reflects the purpose-driven leadership journey of school heads who are committed to transformative and holistic education for all learners.

Figure 18.

Dreams and Determination: The Leadership Aspirations of Multi-grade School Heads



The leadership journeys of multi-grade school heads are marked by purpose, resilience, and heartfelt service. Despite the unique challenges of managing classrooms with limited resources in remote areas, these school leaders remain deeply committed to transforming their schools into nurturing, progressive spaces for learning and growth. As supported by studies such as those by Maybelle et al. (2022) and Esogon and Gumban (2024), effective leadership in such contexts requires both competency-based training and a transformational mindset. The voices of respondents reflect this aspiration: from envisioning a brighter future for their schools, to encouraging peers to pursue higher education, to leading with love and selflessness. Whether it's through inspiring hope (respondent 6), promoting humility and service (respondent 8), or prioritizing empathy and care (respondent 4), these leaders exemplify servant leadership in action. Their dreams go beyond improving infrastructure—they aim to uplift communities, empower teachers, and ensure that every learner is seen, supported, and inspired to succeed.

Table 4.

The aspiration of multi-grade school heads

EMERGING THEMES	CONCEPTS
Strategic Leadership for Holistic School Improvement	Setting Clear Goals for School Development (4)
	Enhancing Student Performance in Literacy and Numeracy (3)
	Improving School Infrastructure and Learning Resources (3)
	Implementing Innovative Teaching and Leadership Strategies (2)
	Strategic Planning and Collaborative Efforts (3)
	Creating an Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environment (2)
	Data-Driven Decision-Making for School Improvement (2)
	Promoting a Culture of Excellence and Accountability (2)
Continuous Professional Growth and Leadership Development	Commitment to Lifelong Learning (3)
	Seeking Mentorship and Peer Networking (3)
	Engaging in Leadership Training and Professional Development (4)
	Pursuing Higher Education for Career Advancement (2)
	Strengthening Instructional and Leadership Competencies (3)

	Participation in Research and Educational Innovations (2)
	Expanding Networks and Collaboration with Education Leaders (2)
	Attending Seminars, Conferences, and Leadership Forums (3)
	Utilizing Feedback and Experience for Continuous Growth (2)
Sustainable Leadership and School Governance	Ensuring Long-Term School Stability and Effectiveness (3)
	Strategic Planning for Sustainable Leadership (3)
	Developing Leadership Succession Plans (2)
	Encouraging Participatory Leadership and Shared Responsibilities (3)
	Fostering a Culture of Accountability and Continuous Improvement (2)
	Building Strong Teamwork and Collaboration (2)
	Establishing Systems for Effective School Governance (2)
	Implementing Long-Term Solutions for Staffing and Resource Challenges (2)
	Encouraging Teachers to Take on Leadership Roles (2)
Collaborative Leadership and Inclusive School Culture	Encouraging Teamwork and Shared Leadership (4)
	Fostering Collaboration with Teachers, Parents, and Stakeholders (4)
	Promoting Open Communication and Trust (2)
	Strengthening Teacher Collaboration for Instructional Improvement (2)
	Establishing a Professional Learning Community (2)
	Facilitating Shared Decision-Making and Collective Problem-Solving (2)
	Building an Inclusive and Supportive School Environment (2)
	Ensuring Consensus-Building in Decision-Making (1)
Enhancing Student Learning and Holistic Development	Improving Academic Performance in Reading and Numeracy (3)
	Implementing Data-Driven Instructional Strategies (3)
	Ensuring Equitable Learning Opportunities for All Students (2)
	Addressing Learning Gaps Through Targeted Interventions (2)
	Fostering Holistic Student Development and Well-Being (2)
	Utilizing Assessments to Monitor and Improve Learning Outcomes (2)
	Implementing Inclusive and Student-Centered Teaching Practices (2)
	Encouraging Student Engagement and Participation (1)
	Measuring and Celebrating Student Achievements (1)

The data in Table 4 reveals that multi-grade school heads hold strong aspirations centered on meaningful school improvement, professional growth, and student-centered leadership. Many respondents emphasized the need for clear, strategic goals to enhance school infrastructure, academic performance—particularly in literacy and numeracy—and overall learning environments. Equally important is their commitment to continuous development through training, mentorship, and advanced education, reflecting humility and a drive for transformational leadership. The responses also highlight a vision for sustainable leadership, including long-term planning and inclusive, participatory governance. Collaboration stands out as a key leadership value, with school heads actively fostering trust and engagement among teachers, parents, and stakeholders. Most notably, their goals reflect a holistic approach to education—prioritizing not just academics but also the emotional, social, and moral development of learners. Together, these aspirations paint a picture of dedicated leaders striving to uplift their schools and communities through resilience, shared responsibility, and student-focused strategies.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that newly appointed school heads in multi-grade schools face multifaceted challenges as they transition from teaching to leadership roles, balancing administrative duties, instructional quality, limited resources, and time constraints. Despite these difficulties, their resilience plays a key role in navigating the complexities of their work. Effective work adjustment is largely influenced by the presence of strong support systems, including mentorship, training, and peer collaboration, alongside emotional adaptability and ongoing professional development. Their prior teaching experience provides a valuable foundation, but sustained institutional support is essential for leadership success. Additionally, these school heads hold clear aspirations for holistic school improvement, focusing on enhanced learning outcomes, inclusive leadership practices, improved infrastructure, and equitable access to education. They envision sustainable leadership structures built on collaboration, participatory governance, and strong partnerships with teachers, parents, and the wider community.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusions drawn, several recommendations are proposed to support newly appointed school heads in multi-grade schools. The Department of Education may enhance leadership training programs specifically designed to address the unique challenges of multi-grade settings. School administrations are encouraged to provide targeted support through mentorship and peer networks to improve leadership adjustment and effectiveness. Resource allocation for multi-grade schools should be prioritized to ensure access to adequate teaching materials, technology, and infrastructure. Encouraging school heads to adopt data-driven decision-making can help improve student learning outcomes and overall school performance. Promoting collaborative leadership models that actively involve teachers, parents, and other stakeholders may strengthen school culture and foster a more inclusive and positive learning environment. Future studies may explore the long-term impact of leadership development programs on sustainability in multi-grade school leadership. Follow-up research can also assess the effectiveness of mentorship and support systems in easing leadership transitions. Replicating this study in other regions may help compare challenges and strategies across different multi-grade school contexts.

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