



Voices in the Classroom: A Thematic Exploration of Multigrade Teachers' Communication Skills

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Abstract

This study explored the communication strategies employed by multigrade teachers in linguistically diverse classrooms. Using a qualitative case study design, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with nine multigrade teachers from four selected schools. Data were analyzed thematically to capture recurring patterns and insights. Findings revealed five key themes: adapted communication, multimodal communication, language mediation and support, home-school partnership, and contextualized communication. Teachers demonstrated resilience and creativity in simplifying instructions, using visual aids, collaborating with bilingual pupils, engaging parents, and employing culturally familiar terms. These strategies fostered inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environments. The study recommends integrating interpersonal communication and emotional intelligence training into teacher development programs, promoting peer language mediation, and designing culturally relevant instructional materials. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of effective teaching practices in multigrade settings and support policy efforts to enhance education in indigenous and remote communities.

Keywords: Communication Skills, Emotional Intelligence, Interpersonal Competence, Multigrade Teaching

1. Introduction

Education has long been recognized as a transformative force that shapes individuals and societies. Globally, it is not merely the transmission of knowledge but a dynamic process involving social, emotional, and psychological interactions. Effective instruction is often rooted in the quality of teacher–student relationships, which foster trust, engagement, and meaningful learning experiences. In multilingual and multicultural settings, particularly in developing regions, communication becomes a critical tool for bridging gaps and ensuring inclusive education (Li *et al*, 2022) ^[7]. Multigrade education, practiced in many remote and underserved communities worldwide, plays a vital role in achieving global goals such as Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals by providing access to quality learning for marginalized children. (Cornish, 2021) ^[3].

Scholars have emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships in educational settings. Strachan (2020) ^[10] noted that positive teacher–student interactions contribute significantly to language learning and classroom climate. However, building and maintaining these relationships is a complex task, even for seasoned educators. The Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) has acknowledged this through policies such as DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 ^[4], which promotes safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments. Additionally, DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 ^[5], highlights the integration of interpersonal skills, collaboration, and communication as essential components of 21st-century learning. These frameworks underscore the need for teachers to possess strong interpersonal competencies, especially in multigrade classrooms where instructional demands are heightened by diversity in age, ability, and language.

In the local context of San Luis District, Division of Agusan del Sur, multigrade education is a necessity due to geographic isolation and limited resources. Despite its prevalence, there has been minimal formal assessment or targeted training focused on enhancing the interpersonal and communication skills of multigrade teachers in this area. Teachers often face challenges in

managing diverse learners, adapting instruction, and fostering inclusive classroom environments. While national policies advocate for interpersonal competence, there remains a gap in localized research and professional development that addresses the unique realities of multigrade teaching in indigenous and remote communities.

This study, titled "Voices in the Classroom: A Thematic Exploration of Multigrade Teachers' Communication Skills," seeks to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of multigrade teachers in San Luis. Through a qualitative case study approach, the research aims to uncover the strategies, strengths, and challenges teachers encounter in their interpersonal communication. By thematically analyzing their voices, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of effective communication practices in multigrade settings and inform future policy and training initiatives. Ultimately, it positions interpersonal skills not only as tools for instruction but as vital elements in nurturing social relationships and emotional well-being among learners.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Lev Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Learning Theory (1934) and Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (1995)—two foundational perspectives that illuminate the role of interpersonal and communication skills in multigrade teaching.

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, introduced the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory in 1934. This theory emphasizes that learning is a socially mediated process, deeply influenced by interaction, language, and cultural context. In multigrade classrooms, where learners differ in age, ability, and linguistic background, communication becomes a vital mediational tool. Teachers must scaffold learning by adapting their language, negotiating meaning, and collaborating with pupils, parents, and peers. These interpersonal competencies are essential for managing diverse classroom dynamics and fostering inclusive learning environments. Vygotsky's theory supports the idea that knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue, making communication central to effective teaching.

Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist and science journalist, popularized the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in 1995. His theory centers on the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others. Emotional intelligence includes five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. In multigrade classrooms, teachers face complex emotional and relational challenges. Those with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to build trust, respond empathetically to learners' needs, and create emotionally safe environments that support engagement and academic success. Goleman's framework highlights that effective communication is not only cognitive but also emotional.

By anchoring the study "Voices in the Classroom: A Thematic Exploration of Multigrade Teachers' Communication Skills" to these two theories, the research underscores that communication in multigrade settings is multifaceted. It involves not just delivering content, but building relationships, mediating understanding, and responding to learners' emotional and cultural realities. These theoretical foundations guide the exploration of how multigrade teachers use interpersonal competencies to

navigate their unique teaching contexts, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of effective communication in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

3. Problem Formulation

Multigrade education is a vital approach to delivering quality instruction in remote and underserved communities. However, teaching in multigrade settings presents unique challenges, particularly in managing diverse learners and fostering effective communication. While national education policies emphasize the importance of interpersonal and communication skills, there remains limited formal assessment and targeted support for multigrade teachers, especially in the San Luis District, Division of Agusan del Sur. This study seeks to explore the interpersonal communication strategies employed by multigrade teachers and understand how these skills influence classroom dynamics and learner engagement. Specifically, the study aims to answer the research question: What Interpersonal skills the multigrade Teachers use in their classrooms?

4. Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides a deeper understanding of the interpersonal communication skills of multigrade teachers, particularly in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. By thematically analyzing teachers' lived experiences, the research highlights the role of communication in fostering inclusive, responsive, and emotionally supportive learning environments. The findings will benefit Educators and school leaders by informing professional development programs tailored to multigrade teaching. Policy makers by offer insights that can guide future policies on teacher training and support in remote areas. Researchers contribute to the body of knowledge on communication and emotional intelligence in multigrade education. Teacher education institutions by integrate culturally responsive and emotionally intelligent communication strategies into their curriculum.

5. Scope and Delimitation

This study focused on exploring the interpersonal communication skills of multigrade teachers in four selected schools within the San Luis District, Division of Agusan del Sur: Weggum Elementary School, Datu Sandigan Elementary School, DOP Binatanun IP School, and Luginasan Elementary School. The participants included nine multigrade teachers who had at least three years of teaching experience in multigrade settings.

The scope of the study was limited to the analysis of the Interpersonal Skills of the Multigrade Teachers in terms of Communication Skills. The study did not cover instructional content delivery, academic performance outcomes, or comparative analysis with monograde classrooms. Data were gathered through validated interview schedules and analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The findings are context-specific and may not be generalizable to all multigrade settings, but they offer valuable insights into the realities of teaching in remote and indigenous communities.

6. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the interpersonal skills of multigrade teachers in San Luis District, Division of Agusan del Sur, during School Year

2025–2026. This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of communication, emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, classroom management, and challenges faced by teachers within their real-life teaching contexts. The research was conducted in four selected multigrade schools—Wegguam Elementary School, Datu Sandigan Elementary School, DOP Binatunan IP School, and Lugin-asan Elementary School chosen from a total of 45 schools in the district. These schools were located in remote areas, accessible only by motorcycle, boat, or hours of walking. Nine multigrade teachers who had at least three years of teaching experience participated in the study, selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered using a validated researcher-made interview schedule consisting of two parts: teacher profiles and questions on interpersonal skills. The instrument was reviewed by three teaching experts and tested for reliability through a pilot interview. The

researcher initiated the data collection by securing approval from the Assistant Schools Division Superintendent and school heads, followed by orienting participants and conducting one-on-one interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, with data saturation guiding the final sample size. Descriptive statistics, specifically frequency counts and percentages, were used to analyze the data and describe the participants' profiles.

7. Results and Discussion

Results

The thematic analysis reveals five key communication strategies employed by multigrade teachers in linguistically diverse classrooms. These strategies reflect a culturally responsive pedagogy aimed at making learning accessible and meaningful for indigenous learners.

Table 1: Communication strategies employed by multigrade teachers

Participant Number	Code	Category	Theme	Description
P2	"I have one pupil who understands my language and also knows Banwaon. Sometimes, he translates for me when there are terms I don't know."	Translation and Mediation	Language mediation and support	Teachers rely on bilingual pupils to bridge language gaps and facilitate understanding.
P3 P6 P5 P7 P9	"I make sure that my instructions are clear and easy to understand. I also repeat them, use simple instructions can grasp them quickly." "I give very simple instructions that even the struggling pupils can follow. I also let my pupils repeat the instructions in their own	Clarity and repetition Simplified language	Adapted communication	Teachers simplify and repeat instructions to ensure comprehension, especially for struggling learners.
P7	I also collaborate with parents by talking to them during meetings about their children who need more guidance and follow-up at home."	Parental collaboration	Home-school partnership	Teachers engage parents to support pupils' learning and address behavioral or academic concerns.
P8 P4	I carefully explain instructions using familiar terms that they can easily understand."	Familiar instructions	Contextualized communication	Teachers use culturally and linguistically familiar terms to enhance understanding.
P5	Instructions for the pupils must be clear, using visual aids, real-life examples, and step-by-step demonstrations.	Use of Visuals and Demonstration	Multimodal communication	Teachers incorporate visual and experiential methods to reinforce verbal instructions.

Discussion

Adapted communication emerged as the most dominant theme, (Highest Frequency)) with teachers consistently simplifying instructions, repeating key points, and adjusting their speech to match the learners' linguistic level. This strategy ensures that pupils with varying language proficiencies can follow classroom directions. As one participant shared,

"I make sure that my instructions are clear and easy to understand. I also repeat them, use simple instructions so they can grasp them quickly." Another added, "I give very simple instructions that even the struggling pupils can follow. I also let my pupils repeat the instructions in their own words."

This practice reflects the principles of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the importance of scaffolding to help learners move from assisted to independent performance. By adapting communication, teachers provide the necessary support for learners to succeed within their developmental range.

The frequent use of simplified and repeated instructions among multigrade teachers implies that adaptive

communication is a foundational skill in linguistically diverse classrooms. This supports Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which emphasizes scaffolding as a means to bridge learners' current abilities with potential development. The implication is that instructional clarity and linguistic adjustment are not merely teaching techniques but essential tools for equity in multigrade education. This aligns with Magnopus and Escote (2024) ^[8], who found that teachers' resourcefulness and cultural sensitivity are vital in overcoming educational barriers for indigenous learners.

Contextualized Communication is the second theme that has the highest frequency. Teachers use familiar and culturally relevant terms to explain instructions, making learning more relatable and easier to understand. As one participant explained,

"I carefully explain instructions using familiar terms that they can easily understand."

This strategy is grounded in Constructivist Theory, which advocates for connecting new knowledge to learners' existing cultural and linguistic schemas. By contextualizing communication, teachers help students internalize concepts more effectively.

The use of familiar and culturally relevant terms by teachers indicates that contextualization is key to learner engagement and understanding. This supports Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes the importance of connecting new knowledge to existing cultural and linguistic schemas. The implication is that effective communication in multigrade classrooms must be rooted in the learners lived experiences. This affirms the findings of Magnopas and Escote (2024)^[8], who emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity and relevance in teaching indigenous pupils.

Multimodal Communication is the lowest frequency theme. Teachers enhance understanding by integrating visual aids, real-life examples, and demonstrations. This multimodal approach caters to diverse learning styles and helps clarify abstract concepts. One teacher explained,

“Instructions for the pupils must be clear, using visual aids, real-life examples, and step-by-step demonstrations.”

This strategy aligns with Paivio’s Dual Coding Theory (1986), which posits that combining verbal and non-verbal information improves comprehension and memory retention. In multigrade classrooms, where learners span different age groups and abilities, multimodal communication becomes essential. The integration of visual aids, demonstrations, and real-life examples suggests that multigrade teachers rely on multimodal strategies to reinforce verbal instruction. This confirms Paivio’s Dual Coding Theory (1986)^[9], which posits that learning is enhanced when information is processed through both verbal and visual channels. The implication is that multimodal communication is not supplementary but central to comprehension in heterogeneous classrooms, especially where language proficiency varies. This reinforces the need to view teaching as a multisensory experience, particularly in indigenous and rural contexts.

On the other hand, the theme Language Mediation and Support is also one of the themes; however, has the lowest frequency. In classrooms with linguistic diversity, teachers often rely on bilingual pupils to mediate communication. This peer-assisted strategy helps bridge language gaps and fosters inclusivity. As one participant noted,

“I have one pupil who understands my language and also knows Banwaon. Sometimes, he translates for me when there are terms I don’t know.”

This practice highlights the collaborative role of learners and reflects Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1997)^[11], which emphasizes learning through social interaction. It also supports the idea that cultural adaptation and peer support are vital in overcoming communication barriers.

The reliance on bilingual pupils for translation and interpretation highlights the social dimension of classroom communication. This supports Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1997), which asserts that learning occurs through interaction and modeling within a cultural context. The implication is that peer-mediated language support is a legitimate and effective pedagogical strategy in multilingual classrooms. It also suggests that learners are not passive recipients but active agents in co-constructing understanding, especially in culturally diverse settings.

Home-School Partnership is another theme with the least

frequency. Teachers extend their communication efforts beyond the classroom by engaging parents in meetings and discussions. This ensures that pupils receive continuous guidance and support at home. One teacher shared,

“I also collaborate with parents by talking to them during meetings about their children who need more guidance and follow-up at home.”

This approach reflects Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement, particularly the dimensions of “Communicating” and “Parenting.” It shows that teachers understand the importance of family engagement in reinforcing classroom learning and addressing behavioral or academic concerns.

Teachers’ engagement with parents to support learners at home reflects a broader understanding of education as a shared responsibility. This confirms Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement, particularly the roles of “Communicating” and “Parenting” in student success. The implication is that communication strategies extend beyond the classroom and are shaped by community collaboration. In multigrade and indigenous contexts, this reinforces the idea that culturally responsive teaching includes building trust and continuity between school and home.

8. Conclusions

The findings of this study revealed that multigrade teachers in San Luis District demonstrate a range of interpersonal communication strategies that are both adaptive and culturally responsive. The most prominent theme in adapted communication highlighted how teachers simplify, repeat, and adjust their language to meet the diverse needs of learners. This was complemented by the use of multimodal communication, where visual aids and demonstrations enhanced understanding. Teachers also relied on language mediation, often through bilingual pupils, to bridge linguistic gaps, and engaged in home-school partnerships to extend learning support beyond the classroom. Lastly, the use of contextualized communication employing familiar and culturally relevant terms further reinforced inclusive teaching practices.

These communication strategies reflect a deep awareness of the social, emotional, and cultural dimensions of teaching in multigrade and indigenous contexts. The voices of the teachers captured in this study underscore their resilience, adaptability, and commitment to making learning accessible for all.

9. Thank-You Note

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