



IMPACT OF STRUCTURED LESSON PLANS AND TEACHING PRACTICES ON LEARNERS' OUTCOMES IN MULTIGRADE CLASSES IN MARIHATAG DISTRICT

Amy Crezilda A. Dionaldo ¹, Loveleah B. Albarillo ²

¹San Antonio Elementary School, Marihatag, Surigao del Sur, Philippines

² Saint Theresa College of Tandag, Inc., Tandag City, Surigao del Sur, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Multigrade education provides access to elementary education for learners in geographically isolated and rural communities, but teaching multiple grade levels within one classroom presents challenges in instructional planning, differentiation, classroom management, and resource utilization. This mixed-methods sequential explanatory study examined the implementation of structured lesson plans and teaching practices and their relationship with learners' outcomes in multigrade classes in Marihatag District, Division of Surigao del Sur during the School Year 2025-2026. The quantitative phase involved eight multigrade teachers and 179 learners from four multigrade elementary schools and assessed structured lesson plan implementation, teaching practices, and learners' outcomes using researcher-made questionnaires and available academic records. The qualitative phase used focus group discussions with teachers and selected learners to explain the quantitative findings. Results showed that structured lesson plans were Very Highly Implemented overall (WM = 4.52), with Integration of Grade Levels obtaining the highest rating (WM = 4.60), followed by Clarity of Objectives (WM = 4.52) and Assessment Alignment and Feedback (WM = 4.51). Teaching practices were Highly Implemented overall (WM = 4.48), with Classroom Organization and Management (WM = 4.59) and Differentiated Instruction (WM = 4.56) as the strongest dimensions. Learners' outcomes were Often Practiced overall (WM = 4.06), with Behavior and Discipline (WM = 4.26) and Learning Motivation (WM = 4.22) receiving the highest ratings. A significant high positive relationship was found between structured lesson plan implementation and learners' outcomes ($r = 0.712$, $p < .001$), while teaching practices also demonstrated a significant high positive relationship with learners' outcomes ($r = 0.738$, $p < .001$). Qualitative findings highlighted the value of structured plans, peer learning, and teacher confidence while identifying resource limitations and insufficient multigrade-specific training as continuing challenges. The findings support the development of the SAFE-P

(Structure, Adaptive Learning, Flexible Resources, Experience, and Peer System) intervention to strengthen differentiated instruction, instructional resources, peer coaching, and learner self-management in multigrade classrooms.

Keywords: *multigrade education, structured lesson plans, teaching practices, learners' outcomes, differentiated instruction, instructional planning, learner engagement, Marihatag District*

INTRODUCTION

Multigrade education remains an important strategy for providing access to elementary education in rural, remote, and geographically isolated communities where learner populations are relatively small and assigning one teacher to each grade level may not be feasible. However, teaching several grade levels simultaneously requires teachers to manage different competencies, developmental levels, learning needs, and curriculum expectations within the same classroom. In such settings, instructional planning becomes particularly important because teachers must organize learning activities, allocate instructional time, and maintain learner engagement while attending to multiple groups. In the Philippine context, Naparan and Alinsug (2021) found that multigrade teachers employed classroom management, collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, real-life connections, technology integration, and teacher flexibility to address the demands of multigrade classrooms. These practices demonstrate that multigrade teaching requires more than the simultaneous delivery of different lessons; it requires deliberate organization and adaptable pedagogy.

Structured lesson planning can provide teachers with an organizing framework for addressing these complexities. A well-structured lesson plan establishes clear objectives, sequences activities, aligns assessment with intended learning outcomes, and provides opportunities for differentiation across grade levels. Shareefa (2021) reported that differentiated instruction in multigrade classes can support learners' academic and psychosocial development, although teachers may encounter challenges associated with limited competencies, workload, time, and assessment demands. Thus, structured planning is particularly relevant in multigrade classrooms because it can help teachers coordinate simultaneous instruction while responding to differences in learners' readiness and learning needs.

The quality of teaching practices is likewise important because lesson plans become meaningful only when they are effectively translated into classroom practice. Teachers in multigrade settings must make continuous decisions regarding classroom organization, time management, grouping, instructional materials, differentiated activities, and learner support. Urma and Callo (2023) found significant relationships between teachers' pedagogical challenges and their teaching practices in rural public elementary schools, emphasizing the importance of professional development, collaboration, resources, and continuous improvement. These concerns are particularly relevant to multigrade classrooms, where limited instructional resources and the simultaneous

management of several grade levels may affect teachers' capacity to implement differentiated and learner-centered instruction.

Recent Philippine research further emphasizes the importance of intentional planning and adaptive teaching in multigrade education. Bunga et al. (2025) found that effective differentiated instruction in Philippine multigrade classrooms was rooted in intentional instructional planning, learner profiling, curriculum mapping, flexible pacing, appropriate grouping, contextualized teaching aids, inclusive classroom routines, peer collaboration, and reflective assessment. The study also identified limited technological access and training as continuing barriers to effective differentiated instruction. These findings suggest that structured lesson planning should not be viewed merely as an administrative requirement but as a mechanism for translating curriculum expectations into flexible instructional experiences that accommodate learners across different grade levels.

The social and contextual dimensions of multigrade teaching are also significant. Multigrade classrooms can create opportunities for peer learning, collaboration, contextualized instruction, and community participation because learners of different ages and abilities learn within the same classroom environment. Maloloy-On and Apas (2025) reported that multigrade teachers in geographically isolated schools used creative and contextualized pedagogy, differentiated strategies, peer teaching, and community-based resources despite limited formal training and instructional resources. Their findings also highlighted teacher resilience, professional growth, and collaboration as important elements of effective multigrade practice. Such evidence reinforces the need to examine not only whether structured lesson plans are implemented, but also how teachers use them in actual classroom situations.

The importance of multigrade pedagogy has also gained broader attention in recent scholarship. Contemporary perspectives increasingly regard multigrade classrooms as diverse learning environments that can contribute to the development of inclusive and learner-centered pedagogies. Research on multigrade education emphasizes child-centered approaches, constructivist thinking, inclusion, cooperative learning, and collective educational practices as important foundations for understanding teaching in diverse classrooms. Consequently, effective multigrade instruction requires a balance between structure and flexibility: teachers need sufficient structure to maintain instructional coherence while retaining the flexibility to adjust activities according to grade-level competencies and individual learner needs.

Despite these insights, there remains a need for district-level evidence examining how structured lesson planning and actual teaching practices relate to learner outcomes in Philippine multigrade schools. The thesis underlying the present study identifies this gap specifically in Marihatag District, Division of Surigao del Sur, where multigrade schools serve learners in rural and geographically isolated settings. The study focuses on structured lesson plan implementation in terms of clarity of objectives, sequencing of activities, integration of grade levels, differentiated instructional strategies, and assessment alignment and feedback. It also examines teaching practices related to lesson delivery and time management, classroom organization and management,

differentiated instruction, teaching aids and resources, and teacher confidence and preparedness.

Learners' outcomes are examined through academic performance, class participation and engagement, learning motivation, task completion and on-time submission, and behavior and discipline. The study employs a descriptive-correlational approach complemented by qualitative inquiry to determine the relationships among structured lesson plan implementation, teaching practices, and learner outcomes, while also examining the lived experiences of teachers and learners. The mixed-methods approach is particularly appropriate because quantitative relationships can indicate the strength and direction of associations, while qualitative evidence can provide contextual explanations for how teachers and learners experience structured planning in actual multigrade classrooms.

Accordingly, this study investigated the implementation of structured lesson plans and teaching practices and their relationship with learners' outcomes in multigrade classes in Marihatag District, Division of Surigao del Sur. By examining both instructional planning and classroom practice, the study sought to identify strengths, implementation gaps, and contextual challenges that can inform a responsive intervention program. The findings are intended to provide evidence for strengthening differentiated instruction, instructional resources, teacher professional development, peer learning, and learner support in multigrade settings. The proposed intervention is anchored in the study's SAFE-P framework—Structure, Adaptive Learning, Flexible Resources, Experience, and Peer System—which was developed from the quantitative and qualitative findings to address identified gaps in differentiation, resources, professional development, and learner self-management.

Research Questions

This study examined the implementation of structured lesson plans, teaching practices, and learners' outcomes in multigrade classes in Marihatag District, Division of Surigao del Sur. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent of implementation of structured lesson plans in multigrade classes in terms of:
 - 1.1 clarity of objectives;
 - 1.2 sequencing of activities;
 - 1.3 integration of grade levels;
 - 1.4 differentiated instructional strategies; and
 - 1.5 assessment alignment and feedback?
2. What is the extent of implementation of teaching practices in multigrade classes in terms of:
 - 2.1 lesson delivery and time management;
 - 2.2 classroom organization and management;
 - 2.3 differentiated instruction;
 - 2.4 use of teaching aids and resources; and
 - 2.5 teacher confidence and preparedness?

3. What is the level of learners' outcomes in multigrade classes in terms of:
 - 3.1 academic performance;
 - 3.2 class participation and engagement;
 - 3.3 learning motivation;
 - 3.4 task completion and on-time submission; and
 - 3.5 behavior and discipline?
4. Is there a significant relationship between structured lesson plan implementation and learners' outcomes in multigrade classes?
5. Is there a significant relationship between teaching practices and learners' outcomes in multigrade classes?
6. What are the lived experiences of multigrade teachers and learners regarding the implementation and use of structured lesson plans in multigrade classrooms?
7. Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, what intervention program may be developed to strengthen structured lesson planning, teaching practices, and learners' outcomes in multigrade classes?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, with a descriptive-correlational approach in the quantitative phase and focus group discussions (FGDs) in the qualitative phase. The quantitative phase described the implementation of structured lesson plans, teaching practices, and learners' outcomes and examined the relationships among these variables, while the qualitative phase provided contextual explanations for the quantitative findings. The study was conducted in four multigrade elementary schools in Marihatag District, Division of Surigao del Sur, involving eight multigrade teachers and 179 learners during School Year 2025–2026, with all multigrade teachers included through total enumeration and selected learners participating in the qualitative phase. Data were collected using researcher-made teacher and learner questionnaires, academic records, and a semi-structured FGD guide. The teacher questionnaire assessed structured lesson plan implementation and teaching practices, while the learner questionnaire examined academic performance, participation and engagement, motivation, task completion, and behavior and discipline. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency and percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson product-moment correlation, while qualitative data from the FGDs were analyzed thematically. Ethical procedures included securing institutional permissions, obtaining informed consent and parental consent for minors, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and ensuring voluntary participation.

RESULTS

Table 1. Implementation of Structured Lesson Plans in Multigrade Classes

Dimension	Weighted Mean	Adjectival Rating	Rank
Integration of Grade Levels	4.60	Very Highly Implemented	1
Clarity of Objectives	4.52	Very Highly Implemented	2
Assessment Alignment and Feedback	4.51	Very Highly Implemented	3
Sequencing of Activities	4.49	Highly Implemented	4
Differentiated Instructional Strategies	4.47	Highly Implemented	5
Overall	4.52	Very Highly Implemented	—

Table 2. Teaching Practices of Multigrade Teachers

Dimension	Weighted Mean	Adjectival Rating	Rank
Classroom Organization and Management	4.59	Very Highly Implemented	1
Differentiated Instruction	4.56	Very Highly Implemented	2
Lesson Delivery and Time Management	4.45	Highly Implemented	3
Teacher Confidence and Preparedness	4.41	Highly Implemented	4
Use of Teaching Aids and Resources	4.37	Highly Implemented	5
Overall	4.48	Highly Implemented	—

Table 3. Learners' Outcomes in Multigrade Classes

Learners' Outcome Dimension	Weighted Mean	Adjectival Rating	Rank
Behavior and Discipline	4.26	Often Practiced	1
Learning Motivation	4.22	Often Practiced	2
Class Participation and Engagement	4.06	Often Practiced	3
Academic Performance	3.92	Often Practiced	4
Task Completion and On-time Submission	3.83	Often Practiced	5
Overall	4.06	Often Practiced	—

Table 4. Relationship Between Structured Lesson Plan Implementation and Learners' Outcomes

Variables	r-value	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
SLP Implementation vs. Academic Performance	0.692	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho ₁
SLP Implementation vs. Class Participation and Engagement	0.708	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho ₁
SLP Implementation vs. Learning Motivation	0.718	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho ₁
SLP Implementation vs. Task Completion	0.682	< .001	Moderate Positive	Reject Ho ₁
SLP Implementation vs. Behavior and Discipline	0.702	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho ₁
Overall SLP Implementation vs. Overall Learners' Outcomes	0.712	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho₁

Table 5. Relationship Between Teaching Practices and Learners' Outcomes

Variables	r-value	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
Teaching Practices vs. Academic Performance	0.716	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho ₂
Teaching Practices vs. Class Participation and Engagement	0.728	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho ₂
Teaching Practices vs. Learning Motivation	0.742	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho ₂
Teaching Practices vs. Task Completion	0.705	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho ₂
Teaching Practices vs. Behavior and Discipline	0.724	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho ₂
Overall Teaching Practices vs. Overall Learners' Outcomes	0.738	< .001	High Positive	Reject Ho₂

Table 6. Emergent Themes from the Qualitative Findings

Theme	Core Finding
1. The Plan as a Lifeline in a Complex Classroom	Structured lesson plans served as cognitive roadmaps that helped teachers manage simultaneous instruction across multiple grade levels and reduce transition difficulties.

Theme	Core Finding
2. Differentiation Is Difficult Without Adequate Resources	Teachers valued differentiated instruction but experienced difficulty implementing fully tiered activities and varied output options because of limited materials and time.
3. Older Learners as Informal Teachers	Cross-age peer tutoring naturally emerged in multigrade classrooms, with older learners helping younger classmates during independent work.
4. Confidence Grows Through Practice, Not Through Training Alone	More experienced multigrade teachers expressed greater confidence, while newer teachers described an adjustment period characterized by trial and error; participants also noted limited multigrade-specific professional development.
5. Structure Creates Safety, and Safety Enables Learning	Predictable routines and clear lesson structures created a sense of psychological safety, supporting learner self-regulation and participation.

Table 7. Proposed SAFE-P Intervention Framework

SAFE-P Component	Focus/Intended Response
Structure	Strengthen organized lesson planning, sequencing, classroom routines, and grade-level integration.
Adaptive Learning	Strengthen differentiated, learner-centered, tiered, and flexible instructional strategies.
Flexible Resources	Develop and maximize low-cost, accessible, improvised, and learner-created instructional materials.
Experience	Build teacher confidence through practice, mentoring, coaching, collaborative lesson study, and professional development.
Peer System	Strengthen peer tutoring, peer collaboration, and learner self-management.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that structured lesson plans were very highly implemented in the multigrade classrooms, particularly in the integration of grade levels, clarity of objectives, and alignment of assessment and feedback. This suggests that teachers have developed systematic approaches for organizing simultaneous instruction across different grade levels. The result is consistent with Boreros et al. (2024), who found that differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and flexible grouping were perceived as highly effective in multigrade classrooms and were positively associated with pupils' academic achievement. In the present study, the strong rating for grade-level integration may likewise reflect teachers' ability to organize learners according to different instructional requirements while maintaining common classroom routines. The relatively lower rating for differentiated instructional strategies, particularly learner-choice reflection

activities, however, indicates that having a well-structured plan does not necessarily mean that all forms of learner-centered differentiation are implemented equally.

The high implementation of teaching practices further demonstrates that multigrade teachers were able to translate structured plans into organized classroom practices. Maynopas and Escote (2024) identified grouping, differentiated instruction, heterogeneous grouping, positive reinforcement, activity integration, and contextualized practices as among the effective practices used by multigrade teachers in indigenous schools in Davao del Norte. This supports the present finding that classroom organization and differentiated instruction were the strongest teaching-practice dimensions. The finding is particularly relevant because multigrade instruction requires teachers to coordinate several groups while maintaining learner participation and independent work. At the same time, the relatively lower rating for the use of teaching aids and resources suggests that pedagogical competence may be constrained when instructional materials are inadequate.

The findings on learners' outcomes show a generally positive pattern, with behavior and discipline and learning motivation receiving the highest ratings, while academic performance and task completion received comparatively lower ratings. This pattern suggests that structured classroom routines and organized teaching practices may be particularly supportive of learners' behavioral and motivational dispositions, whereas academic mastery and self-management may require more targeted interventions. Macuja (2026) similarly reported that multigrade schools with supportive learning environments and highly rated instructional practices demonstrated satisfactory to very satisfactory learner academic performance, with classroom climate, positive peer interactions, lesson planning, and organized learning activities emerging as important elements. The convergence between the two studies strengthens the interpretation that instructional organization and classroom climate are important contextual conditions for learner success in multigrade settings.

The significant positive relationship between structured lesson plan implementation and learners' outcomes ($r = .712$, $p < .001$) provides quantitative evidence that stronger implementation of structured planning is associated with more favorable learner outcomes. Importantly, the relationship was evident across all five outcome dimensions, with learning motivation showing the strongest association and task completion the weakest. This pattern suggests that structured planning may be particularly relevant to creating predictable instructional sequences that support learner motivation and engagement. However, because the study employed a descriptive-correlational design, the finding should be interpreted as an association rather than a causal effect. The result is also compatible with Boreros et al. (2024), whose study found a strong positive relationship between differentiated instruction and academic achievement in multigrade classrooms.

The stronger relationship between teaching practices and learners' outcomes ($r = .738$, $p < .001$) suggests that the actual enactment of instruction may have a closer association with learner outcomes than lesson planning alone. The strongest relationship was observed with learning motivation ($r = .742$), followed by class participation and

engagement ($r = .728$) and behavior and discipline ($r = .724$). This finding is meaningful because multigrade teaching requires teachers to continuously make real-time adjustments in grouping, pacing, explanation, monitoring, and learner support. Rondero and Casupanan (2024) similarly found that multigrade teachers in far-flung schools encountered difficulties in classroom and time management, addressing learner diversity, and handling multiple grades, while resourcefulness, resilience, innovation, and support systems helped teachers cope with these demands. Thus, the present findings suggest that instructional practices that are responsive to the immediate classroom situation are particularly important in multigrade settings.

The qualitative findings further explain the quantitative results. Participants described the structured lesson plan as a “lifeline” that provided a cognitive roadmap for managing simultaneous grade-level instruction, while also acknowledging that differentiation becomes difficult when time and instructional resources are limited. The finding that older learners function as informal teachers also provides an important explanation for the relatively strong participation, motivation, and behavior outcomes. Peer-assisted learning can allow teachers to extend instructional support beyond direct teacher-learner interaction. The experiences reported by the participants are consistent with Rondero and Casupanan’s (2024) observation that resourcefulness, innovation, resilience, and support systems help teachers manage the challenges of far-flung multigrade classrooms.

Resource limitations also emerged as an important issue across the findings. The lowest teaching-practice dimension was the Use of Teaching Aids and Resources (WM = 4.37), while the lowest individual item involved encouraging learners to create their own visual aids (WM = 3.62). This is consistent with the UNICEF Philippines (2024) report on multigrade schools affected by Typhoon Odette, which examined the conditions necessary for introducing digital learning and ICT-enhanced pedagogy and identified continuing gaps that needed to be addressed when expanding technology-supported learning in multigrade schools. The present findings therefore reinforce the need for interventions that do not rely solely on teacher training but also strengthen access to adaptable, low-cost, and context-appropriate learning resources.

The qualitative finding that teacher confidence grows through experience also has implications for professional development. Teachers with greater multigrade experience reported greater confidence in managing simultaneous grade levels, whereas less experienced teachers described an adjustment period involving trial and error. This suggests that professional development for multigrade teachers should extend beyond one-time training and incorporate mentoring, collaborative lesson study, peer observation, and opportunities to practice multigrade-specific strategies. The findings of Maynopas and Escote (2024) likewise demonstrate that multigrade teachers develop context-sensitive practices in response to the particular characteristics of their learners and communities. Such evidence supports the proposed SAFE-P intervention, particularly its emphasis on experience, peer systems, flexible resources, and adaptive instructional planning.

Finally, the convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence provides a strong rationale for the proposed SAFE-P intervention. The quantitative results identify specific areas requiring attention differentiated instructional strategies, instructional resources, academic performance, and task completion while the qualitative findings explain the contextual conditions underlying these gaps. The proposed framework therefore appropriately combines Structure, Adaptive Learning, Flexible Resources, Experience, and Peer System rather than treating lesson planning as an isolated teacher competency. The intervention is also consistent with recent Philippine evidence emphasizing collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, resourcefulness, contextualized practices, and sustained teacher support in multigrade environments.

Conclusions

The study concluded that structured lesson plans and teaching practices are strongly and positively associated with learners' outcomes in multigrade classes in Marihatag District. Structured lesson plan implementation was very highly implemented, particularly in integrating grade levels, clarifying objectives, and aligning assessment and feedback, while teaching practices were highly implemented, with classroom organization and management and differentiated instruction emerging as key strengths. Learners generally demonstrated positive outcomes, particularly in behavior and discipline and learning motivation, although academic performance and task completion showed areas requiring further support. The significant relationships between structured lesson plan implementation and learners' outcomes ($r = .712$, $p < .001$) and between teaching practices and learners' outcomes ($r = .738$, $p < .001$) indicate that stronger instructional planning and classroom practices are consistently related to more favorable learner outcomes. The qualitative findings further emphasize that structured planning provides teachers with an essential guide for managing complex multigrade classrooms, while resource limitations and insufficient multigrade-specific professional development remain important challenges. Thus, strengthening differentiated planning, accessible instructional resources, peer-supported professional learning, and learner-centered practices through the proposed SAFE-P intervention may provide a practical direction for sustaining and improving teaching and learning in multigrade classrooms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, it is recommended that the Marihatag District and school heads strengthen support for multigrade teachers through sustained, multigrade-specific professional development focusing on differentiated instruction, multi-level lesson planning, assessment, classroom and time management, and the use of contextualized and low-cost instructional resources. Teachers are encouraged to further develop learner-centered and differentiated activities, provide varied opportunities for learners to demonstrate understanding, and maximize peer tutoring and collaborative learning to address differences across grade levels. Schools may also establish a shared repository of ready-to-use, curriculum-aligned and locally developed learning materials and provide opportunities for peer coaching, lesson study, and Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions. The proposed SAFE-P intervention may be implemented and monitored to strengthen structured lesson planning, resource

utilization, teacher collaboration, and learner self-management, particularly in areas where academic performance and task completion require further support. Finally, future researchers may examine the implementation and longer-term effectiveness of the intervention across a larger number of multigrade schools and participants to provide broader evidence for improving multigrade education.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The study adhered to established ethical standards governing educational research involving teachers and learners. Prior to data collection, the researcher secured the necessary permissions from the appropriate education authorities, district personnel, and school heads. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from teacher-participants, while parental or legal-guardian consent and learner assent were secured for participants below 18 years of age. Participants were informed of the purpose and procedures of the study, their right to decline or withdraw from participation, and the measures taken to protect their privacy. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting by limiting access to research data and avoiding the disclosure of personally identifiable information. The researcher also ensured that participation did not expose learners or teachers to unnecessary risks, coercion, or disadvantage, and that data were used solely for the stated research purposes. These practices are consistent with DepEd requirements emphasizing informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, learner protection, and responsible handling of research data.

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APA Citation:

Dionaldo, A. C. A., & Albarillo, L. B. (2026). IMPACT OF STRUCTURED LESSON PLANS AND TEACHING PRACTICES ON LEARNERS' OUTCOMES IN MULTIGRADE CLASSES IN MARIHATAG DISTRICT. *Ignatian International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 4(9), 1794–1806. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23010186>

Corresponding author: amycrezilda.dionaldo@deped.gov.ph