

Managing the Curriculum in Small Schools and Multi-Grade Classrooms

Tebogo Jillian Mampane¹

Ayesha Carrim²

Abstract

The research examines the teaching challenges faced by rural, small multi-grade schools, which include logistical obstacles, insufficient resources, and a variety of learner requirements. Curriculum management in small multi-grade classrooms is the subject of this literature review research methodology paper. In these situations, educators are confronted with the necessity of developing novel educational approaches to address diverse learner requirements and resource constraints. The literature reviewed emphasizes the importance of curriculum management in ensuring the efficacy of teaching and the success of learners. The research endeavours to identify community support and participation in ensuring professional development methods in multi-grade schools. The literature results indicated that effective curriculum management enhances small and multi-grade education, as well as presents unique challenges and opportunities for educators. To optimise curriculum delivery in multi-grade classes, it is necessary to implement effective strategies and methodologies. Rural multi-grade classrooms can succeed with appropriate teaching practices and teacher professional development. The study concentrated on prior research on small multi-grade institutions. Curriculum management necessitates community support, differentiated instruction, and flexible planning. Schools may benefit from engagement with their communities and the adaptation of multi-grade teaching practices to meet local needs through the research initiative. The Ecological Systems Theory was employed as a prism to emphasise the numerous influences on multi-grade teaching and suggests that policymakers and educational leaders allocate professional development, curriculum adaptation, and collaborative planning time for small schools. Educator collaboration, resource funding, and specialised training programs for multi-grade teachers are all recommended. The research indicates that institutional reforms are necessary to guarantee that all learners have access to quality education, irrespective of their location,

¹ University of South Africa; Department of Early Childhood Education, South Africa, emampatj@unisa.ac.za

² University of South Africa; Department of Early Childhood Education, South Africa. Ecarrim1@unisa.ac.za

and to enhance the sustainability and success of rural and multi-grade education.

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Introduction

The objective of requiring a guarantee of quality leadership and management, as well as teaching and learning in multi-grade schools, is to enhance the performance of learners. This issue has been the subject of research and debate in numerous regions of South Africa (Schollar, 2017). Multi-grade courses are becoming increasingly prevalent in numerous educational institutions due to the low number of learners in rural areas (Msimanga, 2022). These classes can foster collaborative learning and peer support by providing learners with a diverse learning environment. However, they are not without their challenges, including the potential for achievement disparities and the necessity of individualised instruction (Taole, 2022). Coherent multi-grade education support is associated with desirable school-level outcomes in terms of meeting performance expectations and translating information about performance into routine teaching and learning practices. The organisational learning of teachers and their professional development are the primary focus of pedagogical leadership (Heikka 2014). Human capital, which is integrated into the curriculum and the knowledge framework of pedagogical thinking, is a prerequisite for pedagogical leadership, according to Jakachira, Chingwanangwana, and Chimbunde (2023). It is also necessary for multi-grade leadership to possess the necessary management and monitoring skills to support the pedagogical approach under consideration. In multi-grade institutions, the distinction between leadership and management is rooted in the approach and focus. In multi-grade schools, leadership entails the establishment of a vision, the motivation of educators, the cultivation of innovation, and the establishment of a supportive, adaptive learning environment (Tredoux, 2020). It prioritises motivation, community involvement, and academic guidance to achieve long-term objectives. In contrast, management concentrates on the day-to-day operations. This encompasses the organisation of resources, the maintenance of

schedules, the supervision of curriculum implementation, and the resolution of immediate concerns, such as teacher workload and learner performance. Leadership and management are both indispensable for the success of multi-grade schools, as leadership facilitates innovation and change, while management guarantees effective operations (Taole, Mudau, Majola, and Mukhati, 2024).

The educational landscape is increasingly acknowledging the importance of multi-grade classrooms and small schools. Educators in rural schools with minimal enrolment in South Africa encounter significant obstacles that necessitate multi-grade teaching. The rural schools were established with the expectation that the region would prosper, and the residents' livelihoods would be improved (Taole, et al, 2024). Community-built classrooms are scarce, and as a result, the Department of Education allocates fewer educators to provide multi-grade education to all learners. The probability of school expansion is low, as the population is dispersed across villages and residences and does not appear to be increasing. Challenges of parallel instruction of two to three grades in a single classroom compromise the anticipated quality of teaching and learning, as well as the inadequate road infrastructure that results in persistent learner absence (Tomlinson, Kaplan, Renzulli, Purcell, Leppien, Burns & Imbeau, 2008). Schools are lacking in educational resources due to the government's neglect of their provision. Teachers as well as managers encounter unique difficulties in environments, which are occasionally situated in rural or underprivileged regions. Curriculum management systems are essential for the effective teaching and learning of multi-grade classes, which include children of all ages and abilities. It is imperative to comprehend the intricate structure of these ecosystems to enhance academic achievement and learner engagement. Contemporary studies on curriculum administration in small schools and multi-grade classrooms were rigorously analysed in the literature review. The results of numerous studies elucidate the most effective strategies, the challenges faced by educators, and the impact of educational environments on learner outcomes. In rural and under-resourced areas, classrooms accommodate multiple grade levels of learners as the number of students is not enough to justify single-grade classes. These classrooms offer a distinctive learning environment that enables learners of diverse ages and abilities to learn from one another. In

multi-grade environments, peer learning is promoted, where older learners assist younger learners and teachers adapt courses to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners. This adaptable approach fosters personalised learning, which in turn aids in the development of skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and independence. Multi-grade classrooms offer an education that is inclusive and community-focused, despite the presence of obstacles such as resource constraints. Consequently, they contribute to the reduction of educational access disparities.

Strategies For Curriculum Management

This literature review provides a comprehensive examination of the challenges and potential solutions for the management of curricula in multi-grade classrooms and small schools. Additional research is required to ascertain the long-term impacts of these educational environments on the efficacy of managing teaching and the outcomes of learning. In multi-grade classrooms, effective curriculum administration necessitates the development of teaching strategies that cater to the requirements of learners at varying grade levels. Research indicates that the implementation of strategies such as project-based learning and thematic education can enhance comprehension and engagement (Taole, 2022). Individualised lessons, which are enabled by technological integration, enable learners to progress through the material at their own pace (Msimanga, 2022). It is essential to provide differentiated education in multi-grade classes to accommodate the diverse needs of children. Several illustrative situations are provided below:

Flexible grouping: Learners are arranged into groups according to their interests or similar skill levels for tasks. For example, learners may be organised into groups based on their level of reading proficiency during a reading class. While advanced readers engage with complex literature, others use more basic resources to focus on fundamental abilities.

Choice boards: Students are presented with a variety of activities that are designed to accommodate a wide range of learning methods and interests. In a scientific field, learners have the option of doing experiments, creating a poster, or writing a report, which allows them to engage with the subject in their own unique way.

Stratified assignments: Assignments are organised into varying degrees of difficulty by the level of proficiency of the learners. In a mathematics session, certain learners may participate in fundamental addition exercises, while others may encounter word problems that necessitate advanced cognitive abilities.

Learning stations: The classroom is partitioned into different areas that emphasise a variety of skills or subjects, allowing learners to interact with information at their own pace and rotate. Diverse learning levels may be accommodated by designating one station to prioritise reading comprehension, another to concentrate on writing skills, and a third to participate in mathematical activities.

Project-centric learning: Learners participate in open-ended programs that can be customised to their abilities. Depending on the talents and interests of the learners, a history assignment may allow them to create a timeline, compose a report, or develop a presentation.

Personalised learning plans: Learners are provided with personalised plans that are tailored to their educational objectives and testing results. While a student who is struggling with mathematics may participate learning exercises, another student who excels may pursue more challenging subjects.

Utilisation of technology: Educational experiences that are specifically educational are provided by technology instruments. Educational software has the potential to simplify mathematical problems by the level of achievement of the learners, thereby facilitating personalised learning experiences.

Collaborative instruction: Advanced learners contribute to the distribution of information to their colleagues. A learner who understands a mathematical concept will explain to a peer who is struggling, thereby assisting one another. These strategies promote a more inclusive and successful learning environment by enabling all students in a multi-grade classroom to engage meaningfully with the content.

Strategies For Effective Delivery of Curriculum

Flexible planning

In multi-grade classrooms, adaptive curriculum models enable educators to effectively address the diverse needs of students (Mashau & Thakhathi, 2018). Indeed, it is essential to have curriculum models that are flexible enough to accommodate the distinctive needs of

multi-grade classrooms. Educators are able to modify lesson plans and activities to accommodate various learning paces and grade levels as a result of these models (Taole, 2022). Educators should modify their curricula to accommodate multi-grade classrooms (Bajpai & Pandey, 2023). Additionally, the execution of adaptive curriculum models and targeted instructor support can improve educational outcomes in multi-grade classrooms (Cobbinah, 2022). Due to this adaptability, educators in geographically isolated regions are frequently compelled to develop and implement adaptive curriculum models to meet the diverse needs of their students (Mopuyang, 2024). In addition, educators can create adaptive curriculum models by utilising local resources through the application of a bricolage approach (Dube & Jita, 2020).

The implementation of effective planning strategies, such as collaborative planning and resource sharing, is essential for successful multi-grade teaching (Mashau & Thakhathi, 2018). In multi-grade classrooms, collaborative planning and resource sharing are essential strategies for curriculum administration (Cobbinah, 2022). Indeed, educators need to create instructional materials that are applicable in multi-grade classrooms (Bajpai & Pandey, 2023). Furthermore, efficient planning strategies, including resource sharing and collaborative planning, enhance curriculum delivery in multi-grade classrooms (Phajane, 2014). In multi-grade settings, the teaching process is facilitated by the incorporation of cross-curricular themes and multi-year curriculum mapping, which have been identified as effective planning techniques in the literature (Taole, 2022). These techniques are essential for the successful implementation of curriculum delivery strategies in rural schools, as they involve effective planning and coordination among school management teams (Mncube & Ngema, 2023). The bricolage approach encourages educators to plan and collaborate creatively, utilising local resources to enhance learning outcomes (Dube & Jita, 2020). In addition, educators in geographically isolated regions frequently rely on collaborative planning and resource sharing to effectively address the diverse needs of their students (Mopuyang, 2024).

Differentiated instruction:

Instructional Strategies: In multi-grade classrooms, differentiated instructional strategies are fundamental for meeting the diverse

academic needs of students (Mashau & Thakhathi, 2018). For instance, differentiated instruction involves the adaptation of teaching strategies to accommodate the diverse learning needs of students in multi-grade classrooms, thereby enhancing engagement and learning outcomes (Phajane, 2014). Educators should employ differentiated instruction to accommodate the diverse learning styles and capabilities of learners in multi-grade classrooms (Bajpai & Pandey, 2023; Cobbinah, 2022). This approach is more effective and inclusive, as it is designed to accommodate a diverse range of learning rates and abilities (Taole, 2022). Furthermore, participants encounter difficulties in evaluating the quality of their educators' work and scheduling class visits. Taole, Mudau, Majola, and Mukhati (2024) argue that principals should serve as instructional leaders by undertaking consistent informal and formal assessments of teachers' performance, which offer valuable insights into the learners' progress and achievements (Mncube & Ngema, 2023). In reality, educators are encouraged to personalise their teaching strategies by leveraging local and immediate resources through a bricolage approach to differentiated instruction (Dube & Jita, 2020; Mopuyang, 2024).

Professional development

Teacher Training Programs: It is imperative that educators in multi-grade classrooms participate in ongoing professional development. Teachers should be equipped with the requisite skills to effectively manage diverse classrooms and implement innovative teaching strategies through training programs (Mashau & Thakhathi, 2018). In reality, professional development programs should be customised to meet the specific needs of educators by providing them with the requisite strategies and tools to effectively manage a diverse array of learning environments (Cobbinah, 2022). For example, professional development for multi-grade teaching should include effective classroom management and learning strategies that are tailored to diverse learner populations (Bajpai & Pandey, 2023). Similarly, professional development initiatives should prioritise the enhancement of teachers' capacities to implement differentiated instruction and supervise multi-grade classrooms (Phajane, 2014). Furthermore, professional development programs for multi-grade instructors should include instruction on flexible curriculum models and differentiated instruction techniques (Taole, 2022). For instance, policymakers could

formulate important policies that address leadership concerns in rural schools by gaining insight into the experiences of principals in rural multi-grade schools (Taole, Mudau, Majola, & Mukhati, 2024). Because of these insights, rural principals must be inducted to guarantee that they fulfil their obligations diligently, provide assistance to their teachers, and effectively manage their schools (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). In reality, professional development programs that are specifically tailored to the specific needs of rural educators can enhance their effectiveness and improve the outcomes of their students (Mncube & Ngema, 2023). Additionally, educators are encouraged to employ local resources creatively to improve their teaching practices through the incorporation of the technique approach into professional development programs (Dube & Jita, 2020). This means professional development programs that are tailored to the unique challenges faced by educators in geographically isolated regions and provide strategies for effective instruction in remote environments are frequently advantageous (Mopuyang, 2024).

Obstacles In Multi-Grade Classrooms and Small Rural Schools

Resource constraints

Financial Constraints: The procurement of essential teaching materials and the maintenance of adequate facilities are impeded by financial constraints, that are frequently experienced by rural schools, which result in poor learning environments. (Mashau & Thakhathi, 2018) There lack of essential resources and support for educators, compromises the quality of education (Cobbinah, 2022). Conversely, the allocation of resources is frequently unbalanced, favouring urban institutions over rural ones, thereby exacerbating existing inequalities (Mncube & Ngema, 2023). Insufficient funding from the state presents a challenge for school leaders in managing the institution effectively and efficiently (Taole, Mudau, Majola, & Mukhati, 2024). For instance, the Department of Basic Education should allocate additional funding to rural schools in South Africa, as they are in underdeveloped regions where parental support is reduced by unemployment (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

Scarcity of Materials: The absence of sufficient infrastructure and learning materials significantly impedes the provision of quality education in rural schools (Mncube & Ngema, 2023). This means that teachers in multi-grade classrooms face significant obstacles as a

result of insufficient resources and materials (Bajpai & Pandey, 2023). When this difficult situation prevails, it affects the efficacy of teaching and learning, requiring teachers to adapt their teaching instruction geared only to those of the limited resources at their disposal (Phajane, 2014). Teachers frequently encounter a scarcity of essential resources, including textbooks and stationery, which undermines the efficacy of their instruction and learning (Taole, 2022). For instance, the discovery of the absence of technological resources for teaching in multi-grade classes was a significant finding, as only a tiny percentage of schools were equipped with modern computers, and many lacked any form of technology (Taole, Mudau, Majola, & Mukhati, 2024). In contrast, teachers require infrastructure associated with ICT in order to function effectively and efficiently (Dlamini, Plessis, & Markham, 2022). A bricolage strategy can help mitigate the consequences of material scarcity by encouraging the use of locally accessible resources (Dube & Jita, 2020).

Diversity of Learners

Heterogeneous Groups: Educators face challenges in adapting their teaching methods to meet the diverse academic needs of learners in multi-grade classrooms (Mashau & Thakhathi, 2018). However, the planning and adaptation of instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of learners in the same classroom are both significant undertakings in multi-grade teaching (ULLN Ghana, 2023). The simultaneous administration of multiple grades in multi-grade classrooms is a highly stressful experience (Bajpai & Pandey, 2023). The complexity and difficulty of instruction are further exacerbated by the necessity for educators in multi-grade settings to balance the academic requirements of learners at varying levels (Phajane, 2014). Research suggests that differentiated instruction is indispensable for satisfying the educational needs of these classrooms, as it is intended to accommodate the diverse learning styles and abilities of students (Taole, 2022). The complexity of managing disparate learner groups is often the cause of teacher restlessness and high turnover rates (Mncube & Ngema, 2023). In addition, learning outcomes can be substantially enhanced by inclusive educational practices that recognize and accommodate the diverse needs of students in multi-grade classrooms (Dube & Jita, 2020). In the same vein, educators in geographically isolated regions face significant challenges in meeting

the diverse needs of their students, which requires the implementation of adaptive and innovative teaching strategies (Mopuyang, 2024).

Inclusive Education: The establishment of a supportive learning environment in multi-grade classrooms through inclusive education practices guarantees that the needs of a diverse student body are satisfied (Mashau & Thakhathi, 2018). For example, adaptive teaching methods can be implemented in multi-grade classrooms to promote inclusivity by acknowledging the diverse learning styles and paces of students (Cobbinah, 2022). Furthermore, multi-grade classrooms promote healthy socialisation and collaborative learning activities among students (Bajpai & Pandey, 2023). In the same vein, inclusive practices in multi-grade classrooms ensure that learners with a diverse range of abilities can learn and engage effectively (Phajane, 2014). In truth, inclusive education strategies are essential in small institutions to ensure that all learners, regardless of their abilities, receive the requisite support. To effectively implement inclusivity practices, it is imperative to adapt teaching methods to accommodate a diverse range of learners, including those with special educational needs (Taole, 2022). For example, parental involvement ensures that learners develop a love for learning, attend school consistently, exhibit excellent behaviour, and achieve satisfactory academic results, all of which increase their chances of success (Taole, Mudau, Majola, & Mukhati, 2024). Furthermore, principals can enhance academic success and learning behaviour by promoting and facilitating parental involvement in their children's education (Riski, Indah, & Toyyibah, 2024). The implementation of effective inclusive education practices in multi-grade classrooms can significantly enhance learner engagement and learning outcomes (Mncube & Ngema, 2023). In reality, a bricolage approach to education employs inclusive practices and local resources to assist diverse learners in rural settings (Dube & Jita, 2020). Furthermore, the successful implementation of inclusive education practices by instructors in geographically isolated regions is often contingent upon the support of the community and parents (Mopuyang, 2024).

Logistics concerns

Management and Scheduling: To guarantee effective learning, it is necessary to implement innovative and adaptable strategies when scheduling and managing multiple grade levels in a single classroom

(Mashau & Thakhathi, 2018). To effectively manage these intricacies and guarantee the seamless operation of the classroom, it is imperative to implement effective planning and organisation (Taole, 2022). For example, in multi-grade environments, it is difficult to maintain a balance between teaching and management responsibilities. Principals frequently encounter difficulties in fulfilling their instructional obligations while concurrently overseeing administrative obligations (Taole, Mudau, Majola, & Mukhati, 2024). In fact, principals in rural multi-grade schools frequently labour after hours to fulfil their administrative duties because of the substantial teaching load. Additionally, the logistical obstacles encountered by educators can be alleviated through the implementation of efficient scheduling and administration strategies in multi-grade classrooms (Mncube & Ngema, 2023).

Transportation and Accessibility: Learner attendance and engagement are negatively impacted by logistical challenges, including inadequate transportation and lengthy travel distances (Mashau & Thakhathi, 2018). Additionally, the administration of multi-grade classrooms can be complicated by the irregular attendance of learners in rural areas, which is exacerbated by transportation and accessibility challenges (Cobbinah, 2022). Teachers frequently encounter obstacles, including hazardous routes, inconvenient accessibility, and extended travel times to schools (Bajpai & Pandey, 2023). Learners' similarly are affected by the same challenges. These challenges negatively affect the attendance and academic performance of learners. In the same vein, the participants' aspiration to deliver high-quality education is significantly impacted by their inability to access technological resources and personnel (Taole, Mudau, Majola, & Mukhati, 2024). In fact, it is imperative to resolve transportation and accessibility concerns to enhance learner attendance and educational outcomes in rural institutions (Dube & Jita, 2020). Teachers in geographically isolated regions frequently encounter low morale because of these obstacles, (Mopuyang, 2024). For educators managing learners of different grade levels, professional development is an absolute necessity. The effectiveness of teachers and the results their learners get in the classroom can be greatly improved via ongoing professional development in areas such as differentiated instruction and classroom management (Taole, 2022). A pleasant learning environment can only

be created if teachers are prepared to deal with the challenges of working with learners of different grade levels.

The Ecological System's Theory

To identify and address the issues that rural schools and schools with multiple grades encounter, this study applies Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977). This theory emphasizes how a child's development is influenced by a variety of environmental systems, ranging from close settings such as family and school (microsystem) to broader social impacts such as community and policy (Garbarino, 2017). Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes the necessity of understanding an individual's complicated relationships with their surroundings. Each degree of interaction influences development (Crawford, 2020). In contrast to traditional perspectives that analyse these impacts in isolation, the Ecological Systems Theory presents a holistic framework that considers the numerous layers of influence on child development. It underlines the necessity to explore these numerous layers to successfully address the special issues that rural educators confront, emphasising the importance of community engagement and supporting educational practices.

Furthermore, applying Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to school networks demonstrates the interconnection of environmental systems and their impact on educational results, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to educational planning and policy (Barbara, 2022). Recognising the numerous levels of influence, from individual classroom interactions to community involvement and governmental support, provides a comprehensive lens through which to assess and address the specific problems of multi-grade classrooms. The approach encourages investigating how contextual influences interact with one another and how they influence individual development and the significance of considering multiple layers of environmental influence to successfully handle difficulties (Barbara, 2022). This study attempts to establish comprehensive techniques that improve curriculum delivery while also encouraging community support and engagement. The Ecological Systems Theory is particularly pertinent to this study since it emphasizes the role of community empowerment and active scholarship in achieving long-term educational changes. Educators and policymakers can build more effective and contextually relevant solutions to improve educational

outcomes in rural and multi-grade settings by combining many levels of impact, from close contexts such as home and school to broader social institutions.

Methods

A systematic review involves locating and critically assessing relevant research, as well as collecting and analysing data (Liberati et al, 2009). This type of literature review assists in finding relevant empirical data for a comprehensive analysis of scholarly sources. The process begins with the identification of relevant research that examines curriculum management in small and multi-grade classes, emphasising educational issues, pedagogical strategies, and leadership responsibilities. The selection of sources involves the use of inclusion criteria that placed a focus on studies from a variety of contexts, including both developed and developing nations, qualitative research on curriculum administration, current publications that have been peer-reviewed, and data about multi-grade classes and activities related with them. According to Lefebvre, Glanville, Briscoe, Littlewood, Marshall, Metzendorf, and Cochrane (2019), the sources that were not included in the analysis included research that was not relevant to the management of the curriculum, studies that focused solely on single-grade classes, publications that were not evaluated by peers, and opinion articles that lacked supported empirical evidence.

Prominent databases including ERIC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar are searched by using keywords such as “multi-grade teaching,” “curriculum management,” and “rural schools.” Upon selecting relevant studies, issues including curriculum adaptation, teacher training, and resource allocation are examined and summarised to elucidate best practices and deficiencies in existing research. By integrating findings and perspectives from many empirical findings, the literature review addresses research questions (Snyder, 2019). This review combines findings from several research on multi-grade classrooms and tiny schools, combining qualitative research, case studies, and theoretical reviews to provide a thorough understanding of the subject. The systematic examination of cases enabled an in-depth investigation of specific events in the literature on multi-grade school contexts. Literature on multigrade staff and the school governing body (SGB) provided valuable insights into curriculum

administration and the unique challenges of multi-grade classes. The literature on teaching methods provided practical insights into learner-teacher relationships and curriculum strategies. This comprehensive approach explores crucial multigrade management concerns such as the impact of school leaders, educators, and governance systems regarding the quality of multi-grade education in Limpopo province; the collaboration between structures and teachers in Limpopo Province for multigrade teaching; the rules, regulations, guidelines, and processes governing multi-grade school creation; and the challenges in teaching multiple grades. A rigorous thematic analysis of literature was done. The investigation generated common themes and issues in curriculum management and effective techniques in small and multi-grade schools, and discovered sample characteristics that had an effect on the phenomenon being studied, such as whether studies conducted in one cultural context show significantly different results from those conducted in the cultural context being studied (Davis, Mengersen, Bennett & Mazerolle, 2014). Resource limits, learner diversity, logistical issues, curriculum delivery options, and professional development were the main concerns. The included papers were chosen based on their relevancy, research methodology rigor, and contributions to curriculum management practice. The significance of the study is that multi-grade classrooms and small schools may understand curriculum management. These findings might improve educational practices by illustrating how to accommodate logistical restrictions and various learner needs. Thus, by exploring curriculum delivery and providing practical advice for educational stakeholders, this study advances rural education.

Results

Research on the management of multi-grade classrooms consistently indicates both challenges and benefits. Prevalent problems encompass the difficulty of addressing several learning levels concurrently, insufficient specialised teacher training, and limitations in resources. Nevertheless, favourable results encompass the cultivation of self-directed learning abilities, peer tutoring, and improved collaboration among learners. Identified effective management practices encompass modified education, curriculum reform, and innovative utilisation of community resources. Principals and teachers who participate in

ongoing professional development and connect with their communities frequently observe enhanced learner engagement and outcomes in multi-grade environments. The following are themes emerging from the literature reviews:

Theme 1: Small Multi-Grade school teachers' views on curriculum management

The literature on educators' views on curriculum management in small and multi-grade schools varies. The study showed that educators' opinions and attitudes strongly influence curriculum administration. Positive beliefs led to more inclusive classrooms, better teaching, better teamwork, and professional advancement. Both incompetent and competent learners benefited from these. Conversely, negative opinions hindered progress and made education less inclusive.

Theme 2: Multi-grade classroom curriculum delivery issues

Due to the different learning demands in a multi-grade classroom, teachers had trouble implementing the curriculum. Providing individual assistance took time and effort, making inclusive learning difficult. These issues were exacerbated by classroom space and support staff shortages. Teachers were frustrated and stressed due to resource shortages, hindering inclusive policy implementation. Differentiated instruction is a common strategy for educators working with learners of different grade levels in multi-grade classes (Msimanga, 2022).

Theme 3: Key curriculum implementation factors

Multiple key curriculum implementation factors were recognised. Professional development and teacher training were important. Specialised training and ongoing support helped educators adopt inclusive techniques more effectively. Thorough preparation allows teachers to adapt their methods and provide needed support, creating a more inclusive classroom. The use of a variety of assessment tools is often required due to the complexity of evaluating learner progress in classes that include learners from more than one grade (Msimanga, 2022).

Theme 4: Collaborative learning

Learners' social skills and relationships with their peers are both improved through collaborative learning in multi-grade environments (Taole, 2022). Teachers noted the challenges of meeting varied

learning needs in these contexts. Customising instructional strategies for learners with different abilities took time and effort. Resource restrictions, especially insufficient support staff, exacerbated these issues. Teachers need ongoing professional development to manage diverse classrooms. Teachers with proper training are more confident in meeting learners' needs.

Theme 5: Educational stakeholders

The research showed that educational stakeholders are crucial to curriculum management in small schools and multi-grade classes. Principals and authorities help create an inclusive school culture. Inclusive leadership led to greater resources, training, and support for educators, improving curriculum execution.

Discussion

Although there are certain distinct difficulties, the literature shows that multi-grade classrooms also provide chances for creative teaching. The methods that teachers use for managing the curriculum need to be creative and adaptable. Technology and collaborative learning approaches have the potential to greatly improve learner engagement and academic outcomes. ongoing professional development is crucial. Teachers are better able to handle the challenges of multi-grade classes and use successful curricular initiatives when they obtain specialised training. However, small schools and classrooms with multiple grades provide unique challenges when it comes to managing the curriculum. Effective techniques and continuous professional help are essential for overcoming these obstacles. Researchers and educators must work together to create effective strategies that cater to the requirements of different learners in these dynamic educational environments, as the educational landscape is constantly changing.

From the literature sources consulted the following recommendations are made: The development of specialised training programs that focus on managing diverse classrooms and multi-grade settings, coupled with continuous professional development to equip teachers with effective curriculum delivery strategies. Provision of additional funding specifically for small and rural schools to address resource constraints, and ensure adequate classroom space, teaching materials, and employment of additional support staff. Encouraging school principals and administrators to adopt inclusive leadership practices, and training school leaders to support inclusive education policies

while fostering a collaborative culture. Developing initiatives to engage parents and the community in the educational process and organise workshops and information sessions to educate parents about the benefits of inclusive education. Designing and adopting a flexible curriculum model for multi-grade classrooms, that allows for flexible lesson plans and activities tailored to different grade levels. Facilitation of regular collaborative planning sessions for teachers to discuss challenges, share best practices, and develop coordinated strategies for curriculum implementation, and to encourage resource sharing and joint problem-solving among educators. Investing in improving the physical infrastructure of rural schools, enhancing classroom facilities, ensuring reliable transportation, and providing up-to-date technological resources.

Conclusion

This research has shown the challenges of managing curricula in small schools and multi-grade classrooms, especially in rural Limpopo Province. By examining educators' challenges and strategies, valuable insights were gleaned. Addressing various learning requirements in multi-grade contexts involves significant work and resources. Teachers need ongoing specialised training and professional development to overcome these problems. Important are inclusive leadership and strong support systems where leaders foster inclusive education and community-school collaboration. Curriculum implementation difficulties can be overcome with proper resource allocation, proper financing, teaching materials, support staff, and infrastructure. The study stresses the need for flexible curriculum approaches to accommodate learner talents and learning paces. Teachers can share best practices and establish coordinated curriculum delivery strategies through regular collaborative planning meetings. Parents and the community must be involved to create a diverse, inclusive learning environment. Geographic and contextual distinctiveness, self-reported data, and resource and logistical constraints are factors. To overcome these constraints, future research should encompass varied contexts and use longitudinal methodologies to track educational practice improvements. This report concludes with recommendations for educational stakeholders to improve small school and multi-grade education. Educational institutions can improve equity and effectiveness by implementing inclusive

leadership approaches, improving teacher professional development, and allocating sufficient resources. Sustainable educational advancements require this holistic approach to ensure great education for all learners, regardless of their background.

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