

# Teaching While Leading: Experiences of Teachers-in-Charge in Multigrade Schools

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## Article Details:

Received: 12 April 2026

Revised: 23 April 2026

Accepted: 30 April 2026

Published: 11 May 2026

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## Recommended Citation:

Nival C. I., Orbista J. R. (2026). Teaching While Leading: Experiences of Teachers-in-Charge in Multigrade Schools. *The International Review of Multidisciplinary Research*. 1 (5), 365-380.  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20126937>

## Index Terms:

teachers-in-charge (tics), multigrade classrooms, lived experiences, teacher leadership, geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA), phenomenological study, educational challenge's, role conflict

**Abstract.** This study explores the lived experiences of teachers-in-charge (TICs) in remote multigrade schools within geographically isolated areas (GIA) of the Madalag District, Aklan, Philippines. It specifically seeks to understand how these educators navigate the complex dual-role responsibilities inherent in their positions. Despite national policies specifically aimed at reducing non-teaching workloads, TICs in these contexts continue to perform hybrid instructional and administrative functions, often acting as both the primary educator and the sole school administrator. The research utilized a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design grounded in Husserlian philosophy to capture the deep essence of these lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six purposively selected participants, each possessing at least five years of multigrade teaching and leadership experience. Data analysis was rigorously executed following Giorgi's Four-Stage Descriptive Phenomenological Method to identify shared experiential structures among the participants. The findings revealed eight major themes that define their tenure: involuntary designation, adaptive trial-and-error learning, systemic resource scarcity, security risks, physiological strain, cognitive overload, relational diplomacy, and professional fulfillment. These results demonstrate that leadership in remote multigrade settings extends far beyond traditional management into complex logistical and relational responsibilities shaped by severe institutional constraints and harsh geographic realities. TICs must manage everything from physical safety to complex community relations while enduring significant cognitive and physical exhaustion. Ultimately, the study highlights persistent implementation gaps in existing workload reduction policies and provides a vital contextual basis for developing localized support mechanisms. Strengthening teacher well-being and ensuring instructional continuity in these remote learning environments remains essential for enhancing overall school effectiveness and educational equity.

## Introduction

The teaching profession has long been recognized as multifaceted, with its primary mandate centered on the delivery of high-quality instruction that responds to the diverse needs of learners. In the Philippine context, teacher quality is anchored in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), which emphasizes the provision of developmentally appropriate, learner-centered, and inclusive pedagogical practices aligned with professional competencies (Department of Education [DepEd], 2017). However, the fulfillment of this instructional mandate is increasingly challenged by the expansion of teachers' roles beyond classroom instruction. Studies have shown that the growing administrative workload assigned to teachers reduces instructional time and diverts attention from core teaching responsibilities, thereby affecting instructional effectiveness and teacher productivity (Ancho & Bongco, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

In response to these concerns, DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 mandated the immediate removal of non-teaching administrative tasks from teachers' responsibilities. Despite this policy reform, implementation gaps continue to persist at the school level. Many educators, particularly those designated as teachers-in-charge (TICs), continue to perform dual roles that require them to balance classroom instruction with demanding managerial functions such as financial management, personnel supervision, and school operations oversight (Solidarios, 2025). This situation is further supported by the EDCOM II Report (2025), which revealed that teachers still spend substantial time performing non-instructional duties beyond prescribed limits. Such overlapping responsibilities contribute to role ambiguity and occupational stress, as teachers are required to simultaneously fulfill instructional and administrative expectations within limited time and resources (Torrino & Naparan, 2024; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

These challenges are more pronounced in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas such as the District of Madalag, Aklan, where multigrade schools are prevalent. In these settings, teachers frequently handle two to three grade levels within a single classroom while simultaneously performing the administrative responsibilities typically assigned to school heads. The complexity of managing multigrade instruction, coupled with limited access to instructional resources and institutional support systems, further intensifies professional demands placed on teachers (Digo, 2021; Berry, 2010). Moreover, teachers in remote contexts are often required to comply with administrative deadlines and reporting requirements despite logistical and geographical constraints. Without adequate leadership preparation, technical assistance, and organizational support, these conditions increase the risk of burnout and may negatively affect both teacher well-being and school performance outcomes (Lovell & Cameron, 2024; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Given these realities, understanding the experiences of teachers-in-charge assigned to multigrade settings becomes essential in informing responsive support mechanisms. Thus, this study explored the lived experiences of teachers-in-charge in multigrade schools in the District of Madalag, Aklan, to examine the managerial strategies they employ in addressing the demands of their dual roles. Specifically, it sought to answer the question: What are the lived experiences of teachers-in-charge assigned to multigrade classes?

The subsequent sections of this paper detail the qualitative descriptive phenomenological methodology employed to explore the participants' firsthand accounts, present the findings organized into eight shared experiential themes, and provide a discussion on the implications for educational policy and the development of localized support mechanisms for teacher-leaders in geographically isolated settings.

## Methodology

### *Design*

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teachers-in-charge (TICs) handling multigrade classes. Descriptive phenomenology is appropriate for examining participants' firsthand accounts of a phenomenon and identifying the essential meanings embedded in their experiences (Tenny & Brannan, 2022). Anchored in Husserlian phenomenology, the study focused on describing participants' experiences as they were consciously lived while applying *bracketing* to minimize the influence of the researcher's prior assumptions (Husserl, 1913/1982).

This approach enabled an in-depth examination of how TICs navigate their dual instructional and administrative responsibilities in multigrade school contexts and facilitated the identification of shared meanings underlying their professional experiences (Oluka, 2025; Tenny & Brannan, 2022).

### *Participants and Sampling*

The study involved six purposively selected teachers-in-charge assigned to multigrade classes in public elementary schools in the District of Madalag, Aklan. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants possessed direct and sustained experience with the phenomenon under investigation.

Participants met the following inclusion criteria: 1) Currently designated as a teacher-in-charge in a multigrade class; and 2) With at least five years of experience handling multigrade instruction within the district. The participants had teaching experience ranging from 8 to 32 years and TIC experience ranging from 5 to 26 years, handling combinations of Kindergarten to Grade 2 multigrade classes. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants.

### *Research Instrument*

Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A), supported by field notes and audio recordings. The interview guide consisted of five sections: 1) Participant profiling; 2) Background and pre-interview questions; 3) Lived experiences as teachers-in-charge in multigrade classes; 4) Coping mechanisms and professional development strategies; and 5) Personal reflections on leadership roles and responsibilities.

Open-ended questions with follow-up probes were used to elicit rich and detailed descriptions of participants' experiences. Field notes were recorded during interviews to capture non-verbal cues, tone variations, and contextual observations not reflected in the audio recordings. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription and data integrity. To establish content validity, the interview guide underwent expert review by three validators with backgrounds in English and Social Studies education. They evaluated the instrument for clarity of language, grammatical accuracy, and contextual relevance to multigrade teaching environments. Their feedback informed revisions that improved the structure and neutrality of interview questions.

### *Data Collection Procedure and Analysis*

Data collection followed three phases: preparatory, orientation, and implementation.

During the preparatory phase, researchers identified participants who were then contacted to schedule interview sessions at their convenience. Prior to the interviews, participants attended an orientation explaining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and confidentiality safeguards. Written informed consent was obtained before participation.

During the implementation phase, one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted. Participants were allowed to respond in Aklanon, Filipino, or English to facilitate comfort and authenticity of responses. Interviews were audio recorded and supplemented with field notes. All recordings were transcribed verbatim to support accurate phenomenological analysis.

Interview data were analyzed using Giorgi's Four-Stage Descriptive Phenomenological Method, which preserves participants' original descriptions while enabling identification of essential experiential structures. Analysis followed four stages: 1) Holistic reading of transcripts to obtain an overall understanding of participants' narratives; 2) Identification of meaning units related to leadership roles, workload management, decision-making processes, and professional identity; 3) Transformation of meaning units into psychologically sensitive statements reflecting the significance of experiences; and 4) Synthesis of transformed meaning units into a general structural description representing shared themes across participants.

Throughout the analysis process, interpretations were continuously compared with original transcripts to preserve participants' intended meanings. An external auditor reviewed transcripts, meaning units, and synthesized themes to ensure analytic rigor and credibility.

To ensure methodological rigor, the study applied strategies aligned with qualitative trustworthiness criteria, including credibility, confirmability, and dependability.

Credibility was strengthened through member checking, wherein participants reviewed their interview transcripts via email or Messenger to confirm accuracy and provide clarifications where necessary. Confirmability was supported through bracketing, allowing the researcher—who also serves as a teacher-in-charge—to consciously set aside prior assumptions during analysis. Peer debriefing with experienced colleagues further helped identify potential interpretive biases.

Dependability was ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting methodological decisions, coding procedures, and theme development throughout the research process.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The study adhered to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice throughout all stages of the research process. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality was ensured using pseudonyms and data de-identification procedures to prevent participants' responses from being traced to specific individuals or schools. Interviews were conducted using respectful and non-intrusive questioning techniques to minimize discomfort. Findings are presented descriptively to preserve authenticity while avoiding evaluative judgments about participants' professional performance.

## Results and Discussion

The lived experience of a teacher-in-charge (TIC) in a multigrade setting is shaped by constant demands and overlapping responsibilities. Across participants' narratives, the roles of teacher and school leader were not separate but simultaneously carried out throughout the school day.

Balancing instructional responsibilities with urgent administrative tasks, often under limited time and resources, makes the role particularly challenging. The following sections present how these experiences are lived and described, from the initial assignment to the role, to its physical and cognitive demands, and ultimately to the development of the TIC as a resilient and adaptive leader. These culminate to the following eight major themes: *Involuntary Designation and Unplanned Assumption of Leadership, Adaptive Professional Practice through Trial-and-Error Learning, Systemic Resource Scarcity and Instructional Misalignment, Security Risks and Geographic Vulnerability, The Physiological Toll of Dual Accountability, Cognitive Overload and Pedagogical Disruption, Stakeholder Engagement and Relational Diplomacy, and Professional Growth and Vocational Fulfillment.*

### *Theme 1: Involuntary Designation and Unplanned Assumption of Leadership*

A key part of the Teacher-in-Charge (TIC) experience is being placed in a leadership role not by choice, but by necessity. In the District of Madalag, teachers often become TICs due to staffing gaps in their schools, making the role an immediate responsibility rather than a planned career step.

#### *The Phenomenon of Automatic Entry and Seniority*

The narratives reveal the immediate transition of the role to management, occurring because the educator is either the sole personnel on-site or the most senior member there. From that point forward, there was no clear line between the teaching and leading roles. Amihan reflects on how her leadership status was established from the start:

*"Thirty (30) years going to 31, 26 years sa multi-graded, automatic ma'am nga naging teacher-in-charge."  
(It has been 30 years, going to 31, and 26 of those years were in a multigrade setting. I automatically became the Teacher-in-Charge.)*

This automatic entry is a systemic reality in rural education where designation is based on seniority. Danaya clarifies this administrative rule:

*"Kato abi hay uwa pata tag mga appointment kung ikaw isaea teacher ikaw man ro TIC kung daywa kamo kung sino ro seniority."  
(At that time, we did not yet have formal appointments. If you were the only teacher, you were automatically the TIC. If there were two of you, the one with seniority became the TIC.)*

Data suggest that teachers take on the TIC identity by considering who has the most experience or those who are simply the last remaining personnel at the station. This is verified by Taole (2024), noting that school heads in isolated multigrade settings rarely receive formal training, as these high roles are frequently filled by teachers who have no choice but to lead due to demographic and staffing necessities. Furthermore, Llego (2019) confirms this, noting that seniority is viewed as the most convenient way to fill the vacancy, hence, becoming the default metric for appointing TICs in the Philippines.

#### *The Experience of "No Choice" Driven by Systemic Necessity*

Psychologically, educators experience this designation as a lack of professional agency because to them, it felt like a responsibility they accepted out of necessity or obligation, rather than out of personal readiness, for the sake of the school's stability. Alena highlights this sense of powerlessness:

*"Twenty-two (22) years without interruptions... Uwa man ngani uwa man ako it choice, adlaw-adlaw gaturu ka adlaw-aldaw man nga gaubra ka it report ag gapasa."  
(For 22 years without interruption... I did not even have a choice. Every day, I taught, and every day, I also worked on reports and submitted them.)*

This sentiment of forced acceptance is echoed by Danaya, emphasizing that:

*"It was a designation that I have no other option but to accept because I used to be the sole teacher in the school."*

Mira also notes her immediate appointment to the position upon her transfer to the district:

*"I used to teach in Bacoor, and upon deciding to transfer, I was immediately designated to the position."*

These stories show that for these teachers, leadership is not a goal they achieved but a condition they had to endure. Simply being physically present during a vacancy became the main reason they were chosen for the role. As Mira stated, being in the district made her automatically eligible to lead. This forced designation creates a state of obligatory leadership where the needs of the institution come before their own career plans. This situation aligns with Noordegraaf's Hybrid Professionalism (2015), where managerial duties are pushed onto teachers because of situational necessity rather than professional design.

### *The Legacy of Forced Leadership and Modern Policy Gaps*

The no choice stories from these teachers show a deep institutional culture where leadership is treated as an immediate obligation rather than a conscious career move. Even though these specific memories describe how the participants first took on the role years ago, that initial start continues to shape how the position works today. This remains true even as modern efforts are made to make the role more professional.

One example of this effort is DepEd Order No 002 s 2024, which was meant to take the administrative load off teachers. However, a report by EDCOM II Policy Brief (2025) shows that these changes are not reaching remote areas where support staff are still unavailable. Without anyone else to help with the workload, TICs have to keep balancing both office work and teaching. As observed by Potane and Recla (2024), this leads to role confusion and heavy occupational stress. In these conditions, teachers are forced to divide their focus between instruction and management duties. Ultimately, leadership is an imposed identity to the TICs in multigrade schools. It is either driven by seniority, geographic isolation, or circumstance, making involuntary designation the primary driver of their professional scenario.

### *Theme 2: Adaptive Professional Practice through Trial-and-Error Learning*

When an educator is thrust into a dual-role mandate without preparatory induction or specific training in multigrade pedagogy, they experience a state of professional shock. In the absence of a formal roadmap, the Teacher-in-Charge (TIC) must navigate the complexities of school governance and multi-level instruction through high-stakes experiential learning and trial-and-error.

### *The Reality of "Cramming" and Role Shock*

The concept of cramming characterizes the initial phase of the TIC experience, representing the professional struggle to reconcile a role for which the educator feels academically and practically unprepared. This is often exacerbated by a specialization mismatch between the teacher's educational background and the actual demands of a multigrade classroom. Amihan describes this intense pressure:

*"Kat sa 1st teaching ko abi hay teacher-in-charge eagi ako. Siyempre ko una hay ga-cramming man ako hay uwa it experience ako. Ang course pa abi hay pang high school hay BSIE ta ako, tapos nag-handle ta ako it primary nga estudyante."*

*(In my first year of teaching, I was already a Teacher-in-Charge. Of course, at the beginning, I was cramming because I had no experience yet. My course was really for high school—I took BSIE—but I ended up handling primary pupils.)*

In this context, cramming means having no time to slowly learn the job. Participants felt forced by the TIC role to become competent in teaching and administration at the same time, without any grace period or instructional help. The role shock Amihan felt points to a bigger systemic issue where teachers trained for high school are placed in primary multigrade settings. This is not an isolated case. Continuing this pattern without proper support can damage a teacher's health. As

Lovell and Cameron (2024) warned, the lack of a proper introduction for rural school leaders is a major cause of their early career stress.

#### *Institutional Neglect and 'Bahala Na' Navigation*

An educator's struggle in a multigrade school becomes much harder when there is no institutional support system in place. Having no formal guidance forces a TIC into a state of isolation where they are physically present but professionally alone. They have no colleagues to turn to for advice when the pressure builds. Pirena reflects on this sink or swim reality that comes from being deployed without a roadmap:

*"Sa 1st time nakon nga nag-multi hay uwa gida ako it knowing sa ubrahon... uwa man abi kami kato it seminar kung paalin magturo it multi ngaron."  
(The first time I handled a multigrade class, I really had no idea what to do... back then, we did not have seminars on how to teach multigrade classes.)*

This psychological state of being "bahala ka euting" shows a complete lack of institutional direction. Without a map to follow, a TIC's professional growth turns into a high stakes process of trial and error. Being forced into an automatically assigned role without any preparation means the TIC must rely on self-directed development to survive (UNESCO, 2021). Resourcefulness becomes a basic requirement for staying afloat. This situation aligns with Noordegraaf (2015), who observed that teachers are often left to use their own localized and improvised strategies to fill a professional void.

#### *Institutional Recognition and the Recovery of Mastery*

While the early career stage is defined by systemic neglect, a significant turning point occurs when professional shock transitions into formalized competence through eventual institutional intervention. Pirena describes this shift while acknowledging the divergence between her early "survival" methods and current formal standards:

*"Ngani madya na-realize ko nga akong mga ging-inubra igto ngato hay medyo maeayo ta sa raya ngara nga seminar."  
(Hence, I later realized that what I did before was quite different from what is taught in seminars now.)*

Furthermore, Danaya points to the recent shift toward better support:

*"In DepEd, we are given seminars to add to what we have learned. We are also given equipment like laptops and TVs."*

For Amihan, these interventions were transformative for her leadership identity:

*"Mabahoe man nga bulig ro training and seminars dahil dati indi gid ako tigo mag-handle it problems like sa PTA training pa gid sa multigrade."  
(Training and seminars are also a big help because, before, I really did not know how to handle problems, especially those related to PTA and multigrade teaching.)*

Through improvisation, the TIC eventually moves from simply surviving the role to formalized mastery. This change marks a restoration of professional self-efficacy. The pedagogical divergence created from isolation was illuminated through Pirena's account, where she shared her realization that her improvised methods were "medyo maeayo" (quite different) from official training. After recognizing the gap, teachers go through a period of "unlearning" and "relearning", reconciling hard-won lessons from years of improvisation with evidence-based standards. This pattern mirrors Potane and Recla's (2024) claim that multigrade TICs' professional mastery is essentially a survival response. Without an initial roadmap, TICs were pushed to turn the "void" into a site of profound expertise. In doing so, the situational burden itself became the very foundation of their leadership identity.

#### *Theme 3: Systemic Resource Scarcity and Instructional Misalignment*

For TICs, managing a school is a daily struggle, especially when it comes to instructional materials. These resources arrived too late to be effective, or worse, they're not just insufficient but often poorly suited to the actual subjects taught. They

describe this as a framework of systemic scarcity. Essential materials are either missing, delayed, or misaligned with the realities of a multigrade classroom.

#### *The Reality of Lack of Resources*

The narrative shows TIC's constant struggle against the lack of basic instructional tools. As this struggle pushes them beyond their demanding roles as educators and managers, they become resource innovators who must compensate for the failings of the central supply chain. Amihan emphasizes that even when training is provided, the materials to implement that training never arrive:

*“Du mga resources ron ma’am ag ro mga libreng seminars naton. Ro resources hay kueang gid kapin hay text books uwa.”*  
*(As for resources, ma’am, even with the free seminars we attend, the resources are really lacking—especially textbooks, because we do not have enough.)*

Also, Danaya shares that the agency often can't even supply the basic requirements to make a classroom functional:

*“Kung amat hay may kulang man sa atong ahensya hay indi man nanda matao tanan, like classroom and teacher, mga books hay kueang-kueang.”*  
*(Sometimes there are still gaps in the agency; they cannot provide everything, like classrooms, teachers, and books, which are still lacking.)*

This experience, in psychological essence, is instructional deprivation. TICs are held accountable for academic outcomes, but they're denied the foundational machinery of education. This unfavorable circumstance leaves them in a state of resource-induced anxiety and a painful sense that they are set up for failure by the very system they represent. This psychological toll was observed in remote Philippine schools, where Felongco et al. (2022) noted that chronic resource shortages and geographic isolation cause teachers to experience heightened psychological stress. The "void" from the missing textbooks is not merely a logistical issue. It's a burden that TICs carry, knowing that the system has simply abandoned them to solve the problem on their own.

#### *Inappropriate and Misaligned Resource Provision*

TICs report receiving specialized materials for subjects they do not handle, while the core needs remain unaddressed. This is a unique aspect of this struggle rooted in the inappropriate or misalignment of resources. Pirena provides a stark example of this administrative misalignment:

*“Kung sa government mana hay madya kaabo-abo a nandang na padaea nga materials mana. Parehas padaehan nanda ako it Science mana, hay uwa man akot Science nga subject.”*  
*(When it comes to the government, they actually send many materials. For example, they sent me science materials, even though I do not handle Science as a subject.)*

Furthermore, on this issue, some teachers reported that the materials provided are culturally or psychologically ill-suited for the learners. Pirena recalls one example where a scientific model actually disrupted the learning environment:

*“Parehas ing padaehan nanda akot tawo ngato hay uwa ta nagsueod ang mga unga hay nahadlok ta.”*  
*(For example, they once sent us a human body model, but the children did not come to class because they were afraid.)*

The identified misalignment of resources represents a decoupling of the central office and classroom reality. The narrative shows that the agency's "push" system of resources fails to account for the specific "pull" needs of the multigrade station. Receiving irrelevant materials becomes part of TICs' source of professional frustration, which signifies that the bureaucracy sees the school as a data point on a distribution list rather than a living instructional site.

As corroborated by Munna (2023), even strong instructional leadership cannot overcome poor facilities and mismanaged curriculum resources. The contextual disconnect between urban-centric resource design and the rural reality of the multigrade learner is illustrated in Pirena's "scary" human model anecdote.

### *The Struggle of Timing and Delays*

Another issue highlighted is the delayed distribution of materials, where delivery often disregards the academic calendar. The late delivery, despite the materials being correct, forced TICs to begin the school year in a state of pedagogical cramming. This was experienced by Alena, noting the chronic untimeliness of resource allocation:

*“Teaching resources provided by the Central Office came later than the start of the school year.”*

This temporal misalignment turns the start of every school year into a crisis. When materials arrive late, the TICs' instructional planning is rendered obsolete. This forces them to revert to the trial-and-error survival mode described in earlier themes. There were efforts from the Schools Division of Aklan to support teachers, similar to this situation, through the quality assurance of contextualized materials (Division Memorandum No. 540, s. 2023). But for TICs, these localized efforts are often a reactive survival strategy rather than a systemic fix. Lovell and Cameron (2024) warned that conditions like this contribute directly to burnout. Adding material preparation to an already loaded dual-role schedule pushes TICs past their physical and psychological limits.

### *Theme 4: Security Risks and Geographic Vulnerability*

In remote schools, the geographic isolation forces educators to navigate both human-made and supernatural threats. With no systemic protection to rely on, they turn to the community as a vital protective shield. The narratives reveal that the isolation of multigrade schools in Madalag is not just a logistical hurdle but a condition that shapes TICs' daily existence.

#### *Navigating Human and Security Threats*

The narratives of geographic vulnerability extend beyond logistical and administrative constraints, encompassing exposure to socio-political instability, particularly in areas affected by insurgency. In remote settings, TICs encounter risks that are largely absent in urban contexts, shaped by their position as outsiders within communities where state presence and formal security mechanisms are limited. Amihan recounts a period when the presence of the New People's Army created a climate of uncertainty and danger:

*“Indi ko malipatan, ma'am, tag nagturo ako nga bukon ko it kilala nga lugar ag mga estudyante. Kapin uso pa kato ro NPA. Hay ginatago ako nanda sang mga estudyante, duyon ang nailaan hay naapinan ako nanda maski mga parents.”*

*(I will never forget, ma'am, when I was teaching in a place where I did not know anyone. At that time, the NPA was still active. The students would hide me for safety. That is what I really liked because they would truly protect me—even the parents.)*

Her account illustrates how insurgency-related threats necessitate reliance on informal community protection. In the absence of accessible state security, survival becomes anchored in relational trust and local support systems. This finding aligns with Lariosa et al. (2022), who note that teachers in high-risk and geographically isolated areas often experience heightened psychological strain due to exposure to violence and political instability, thereby increasing dependence on community-based support for both professional continuity and personal safety.

#### *Supernatural Fears and Physical Isolation*

This isolation also becomes a source of psychological and supernatural dread for TICs. It happens when their administrative work demands travel or unconventional hours in spaces the system does not protect. Danaya recalls that fear:

*“Agyan ngani namon nga aga-aga kami gauli sundan kami it tik-tik impotante makapasa ka it report.”  
(We even experienced going home early in the morning, with a 'tik-tik' [ominous bird] already following us. What is important is that you submit the report.)*

Moreover, this vulnerability deepens when the TIC is the only personnel at the site. Amihan recounts her experience of solitude of being the "sole survivor" in her early years:

*“Siyempre ako malang isaea sa iskylahan kato. That was 1995.”*

*(Of course, I was the only teacher in the school at that time. That was in 1995.)*

In the rural landscape, the "tik-tik" narrative is more than just folklore but reflects a deeper truth. It's a psychological metaphor for the constant sense of being watched that isolation creates. Supernatural fear becomes part of physical isolation. The "omen" seems to follow the teacher precisely because they are alone in a space where institutional protection doesn't reach. The geographic condition intensifies the difficulty of TIC's role, as Digo (2021) explains that teachers in isolated, disadvantaged areas must meet rigid administrative deadlines while dealing with severe environmental and cultural constraints.

#### *Community Synergy as TIC's Protective Buffer*

In Madalag, geographic vulnerability is deeply rooted in its specific topography. The settlement patterns make the delivery of basic services challenging for TICs. The narratives regarding this challenge corroborate the research of Felongco et al. (2022), who stated that teachers in far-flung schools experience a profound sense of isolation that leads to heightened stress.

The TICs' role in the community shifts from government official to community member. Amihan's students hiding her shows how her role changes. Literature confirms that in rural contexts, local stakeholders are not merely supporters but essential contributors to the safety of school personnel. This synergy transforms the community into a hub of relational diplomacy. The TIC survives by building harmonious bonds that transcend their official designation. What starts as an isolation turns into a space of collective protection, where the whole community shares the responsibility of the teacher's safety.

#### *Theme 5: The Physiological Toll of Dual Accountability*

The weight of combining instructional quality and administrative compliance falls on the educator's body. Psychologically, these narratives reveal a transition from professional stress to a state of clinical vulnerability, where the teacher's physical well-being is compromised to meet institutional demands.

#### *Chronic Physiological Strain and Sleep Deprivation*

To maintain instructional continuity, TICs routinely sacrifice restorative rest to satisfy the administrative manager role, often working through the night to protect their classroom hours. For Alena, peak reporting periods result in a total loss of rest:

*"Kung may liquidation hay walang tulugan; kung amat kapin, kung ga-sort."  
(When there is liquidation, there are times with no sleep at all—especially when I am sorting everything.)*

Reinforcing this pattern of extreme labor, Danaya explains that completing mandates requires a 24-hour cycle of consciousness:

*"Haagyan pa namon karon nga hasta alas-tres it ubra tas pagkaagahon hay ipasa mo."  
(We even experienced working until 3 a.m. and then submitting early in the morning.)*

At its core, this deprivation means that the professional self takes over at the expense of the biological self. Sleep becomes a currency that TICs trade away for to comply the system's demands. Teacher workload is a critical issue many educators face, validated by the EDCOM II Report (2025). Educators are forced to spend excessive hours on non-teaching duties beyond prescribed policy limits. This explains why participants like Danaya and Alena find themselves sacrificing sleep, implying that the demands of the practitioner and the manager cannot be easily fulfilled within a single 24-hour window.

#### *Clinical Manifestations and Bodily Breakdown*

The psychological burden of a dual role often transitions into physical symptoms when the pressure of ASAP reporting and instructional preparation exceeds the educator's physiological capacity. While this study focuses on the lived experiences of teachers and does not provide clinical or medical diagnoses, the participants' narratives reveal how professional stress can lead to physical collapse. Pirena recalls an instance where the workload resulted in a loss of physical stability:

*"Dikato ngani ako madya malipong-lipong hay nagpieinsan report."  
(That was also the time when I almost fainted because I was doing multiple reports.)*

The perceived long-term effects of this lifestyle are significant, with participants linking their occupational stress to chronic health challenges. This is evident in Alena's account, where a medical diagnosis served as a turning point for her professional outlook:

*"Parehas mana karon, ay paghinugay ta makon magpa-checkup indi ta makon kaya-kayaha ro mga heart enlargement."  
(Like me, when I was advised to have a check-up because of heart enlargement, I had to reflect.)*

Similarly, Lira recounts frequent bouts of illness caused by the exhaustion of balancing school leadership with maternal responsibilities:

*"Maraming beses na nagkasakit dahil sa puyat at pagod, lalo na nung may sanggol ako."  
(There were many times when I got sick because of lack of sleep and exhaustion, especially when I had an infant.)*

In this context, accountability takes a physical toll. When administrative demands over-saturate the educator's schedule, the stress is absorbed by the body. While symptoms like cardiac enlargement and fainting are clinical in nature, this research views them as physical indicators that the TIC's hybrid role has surpassed sustainable human limits. Termed as "Hybrid Professionalism" (Noordegraaf, 2015), the TIC role, as described by these participants, becomes physically unsustainable. As Torrino and Naparan (2024) argue, this role overlap precipitates intense occupational stress, manifesting in the physical vulnerabilities shared by the participants.

#### *Erosion of Work-Life Boundaries*

When the workload becomes overwhelming, the boundary between the professional and private spheres disappears, leading TICs to literally reside within their workspace. Amihan describes the necessity of staying overnight at the school to meet deadlines:

*"Overtime kung amat una ako gatueog sa iskuylahan hay tatlo pa ang na-printan... Kaya need gid nakon mag tueog sa iskuylahan."  
(Sometimes, I had to render overtime. There were times when I even slept at school because I still had to print materials for [three grades]... That is why I really needed to sleep at school.)*

Sleeping at the school signifies how consuming the TIC role is. The school building ceases to be a workplace and becomes a "total institution" where the educator's life is entirely consumed by the dual role. Ancho and Bongco (2021) describe that the teaching role becomes increasingly hybrid, and administrative demands significantly reduce the time available for restorative rest. The narratives serve as visceral evidence that the TIC's body is the only resource left to absorb the burden when there is no administrative support. This outcome is warned by Lovell and Cameron (2024), stating that resource-limited and high-pressure conditions inevitably contribute to burnout, as the educator's extraordinary endurance is pushed past its biological limits.

#### *Theme 6: Cognitive Overload and Pedagogical Disruption*

The mental strain TICs experience comes from the constant switch between the high-stakes demands of school management and the complex pedagogical needs of a multigrade classroom. Managing both roles at once fragments the TIC's focus and leaves their teaching constantly interrupted.

#### *The Mental Burden of "Juggling" Roles*

Participants compare their daily reality to a circus act. TICs constantly juggle several high-priority tasks, pushing themselves to the point of exhaustion, all just to meet the institutional quotas. Amihan describes her typical day as a state of perpetual cramming:

*"My typical day is like a juggling balls, lalo na kung magsabay-sabay ang mga school reports, cramming talaga."  
(My typical day is like juggling balls, especially when school reports pile up all at once—it really becomes cramming.)*

Danaya shares the same experience, noting that the mental effort of switching between a teacher's mindset and a manager's mindset is inherently draining:

*"It is typical for me to juggle my time accomplishing the administrative function while teaching multigrade level."*

Psychologically, this experience is cognitive multitasking. Balancing two completely different tasks wears teachers down. The brain is forced to operate in two divergent logic systems simultaneously, causing a mental strain. Noordegraaf (2015) calls this Hybrid Professionalism, when the third space of the role forces a constant collision between managerial logic and professional practice. Literal and Sabud (2025) found this dynamic among multigrade teachers in the Philippines. Teachers are overwhelmed, exhausted, and stretched thin as a result of the multifaceted demands.

#### *The Loss of Instructional Momentum*

The "ASAP" nature of modern administrative reporting is a primary driver of pedagogical disruption. The urgency of clerical work often interrupts the flow of a lesson. Pirena explains how a simple digital notification can derail a classroom session:

*"Ag euwas pa karon kung magtunog ro cellphone haron dali-dalion eun nimo ron hay ASAP report ron. Hay karon gida madya nabuoe akong momentum gida sa klase karon."  
(Aside from that, when the cellphone rings, you have to rush because it is an ASAP report that needs to be submitted. Because of that, my momentum in class sometimes gets interrupted.)*

This narrative highlights how digital connectivity can lead to instructional interference, distracting both the teacher and the learners. Pirena further notes the impact on student engagement:

*"Pati mga unga na-distract eun sanda sa lesson hay hato, pata ako gaubra pata it report nga kinahangean nga i-submit."  
(Even the students become distracted from the lesson, because I am still working on a report that needs to be submitted.)*

The cellphone ring signifies an administrative intrusion into a space that should be reserved for learning. Each interruption causes a loss of instructional momentum, draining the teacher's mental energy and compromising their ability to manage multiple grade levels effectively. SEAMEO INNOTECH (2020) confirms that this dual role leads to divided attention, which ultimately diminishes the quality of both instruction and administration.

#### *Decision-Making Fatigue and Sensory Overload*

When dealing with multiple grade levels that demand attention simultaneously, alongside an urgent administrative report, TIC's sense of priority breaks down. Amihan describes this overload vividly:

*"Yung sabay-sabay na mag-ingay ang 3 grade levels kong mga estudyante. Napakaingay talaga, lalo na kapag may nag-aaway, may nagta-tantrum, may gagawa ka pang urgent and ASAP reports, may gina-remedial ka pa. Di mo talaga malalaman kung sino o ano ang uunahin mong gawin."  
(When my three grade levels make noise all at once, it becomes extremely chaotic, while I am also handling urgent and ASAP reports and conducting remedial sessions. In those moments, I honestly do not know who or what to attend to first.)*

TICs describe this as a state of decision-making paralysis stemming from informational and emotional overload. They are caught in a paradox: be a good leader (submitting reports) or be a good teacher (focusing on students). The mind eventually reaches exhaustion after being stuck in the chaos of tantrums and noise layered over administrative urgency. The EDCOM II Policy Brief (2025) confirms what Amihan describes: teachers spend excessive hours on non-teaching duties, which forces cramming and juggling. For TICs, it is a battle for focus where instruction is losing to the urgent demands of administration. Ultimately, TICs are left with a fragmented identity: neither fully teacher nor fully administrator, only caught somewhere in between.

#### Theme 7: Stakeholder Engagement and Relational Diplomacy

The TIC is the face of the institution in remote settings, which also implies being burdened by constant public scrutiny since there is no separate principal to manage community relations. TICs found a way to safeguard their professional integrity

and secure local support by using open communication and building community partnerships. They rely on relational diplomacy to ensure stakeholders understand the complexities of the dual role and the legal use of school funds.

#### Financial Transparency as a Professional Shield

The primary strategy TICs use to maintain community trust is through radical disclosure of school finances, specifically the Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE). By showing parents exactly how money is spent, this prevents the accusations of mismanagement. For Alena, this is a non-negotiable part of the role:

*"Maging transparent, isugid mo kanda tanan nga daya ro ing bakae daya ro MOOE."  
(You have to be transparent and explain everything clearly, especially about funds and MOOE.)*

She further explains that informing the community regarding financial matters is essential for cooperation:

*"Sa community hay manami mata sanda cooperative mata sanda ag sang chat eata sanda.  
Napaliwanag ko malang kanda. Kung amat hay kakon sanda gaagto gakutana sanda."  
(In the community, they are good and cooperative. We stay connected through chat. I just explain things clearly to them. If they have concerns, they come to me and ask.)*

In a professional sense, this transparency is preemptive accountability. The TIC voluntarily opens the school's books to the community to build a buffer of trust. Shonk (2024) identifies this as a hallmark of facilitative leadership, where leaders build collective responsibility to survive under challenging conditions. By being open about funds, the community becomes the TIC's unofficial auditor and ally, ensuring that School-Based Management (SBM) remains functional despite geographic isolation.

#### Diplomatic Resolution of Conflict and Misunderstanding

The TIC is often criticized regarding frequent absences due to district meetings or seminars. To manage these negative impressions, they use formal meetings and local governance (the Barangay) to explain their situation. Pirena describes her approach to dealing with community gossip or complaints:

*"Hay, ang naubra karon, hay gahipos anay ako. Igto dayon ako sa barangay gaistorya."  
(What I do now, is that I first keep quiet myself. Then I go to the barangay and talk about the matter properly.)*

She uses these platforms to educate parents on why classes may be suspended and the school temporarily closed for official meetings, emphasizing the importance of parent attendance during school assemblies to stay informed:

*"Ginghambae ko imaw nga 'diba makon pag-meeting naton, nga kung amat nga pirme ta uwa it klase hay sa meeting ako. Ngani, kung magpatawag ako it meeting hay agto ka man."  
(I told that person that I already explained in our meeting that there are days without classes because I am attending meetings. That is why when I call for a meeting, you should also attend.)*

Lira also uses formal gatherings to manage the negative impressions created by her dual workload:

*"Sa parents mismo hay ginapaathag ko kanda ro role it TIC at the same teacher ag multigraded pa...  
ipinaliwanag ko sa kanila during SPTA Meeting ang sitwasyon." (During meetings with parents, I explain to them my role as a TIC and at the same time as a teacher in a multigrade class... I explained the situation to them during the SPTA Meeting.)*

The TIC functions as a grassroots diplomat, balancing the tension between institutional mandates (district meetings and seminars) and community expectations for consistent classroom instruction. In remote settings where higher offices are physically distant, the Barangay becomes the primary site for conflict resolution and mediation. Consequently, the TIC must rely on relational diplomacy to maintain school order.

In this context, local stakeholders are not merely passive supporters; they are essential contributors to the school's institutional sustainability (Ares-Ferreirós et al., 2025; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2020). Through these partnerships, the TIC transforms the school from an isolated government outpost into a community-owned institution.

This approach aligns with Olana and Paglinawan (2025), who found that high levels of stakeholder engagement lead to improved school accountability. However, while Solidarios (2025) notes that community trust leads to professional fulfillment, Pirena's narrative reveals that negative public perceptions remain a source of significant distress. This confirms that building community relations is a constant, active process of negotiating professional legitimacy. By turning the parents and local leaders into a protective support system, the TIC ensures the school's survival through honesty, constant communication, and the strategic sharing of their dual-role challenges.

#### *Theme 8: Professional Growth and Vocational Fulfillment*

Transformation is the final constituent of the Teacher-in-Charge (TIC) lived experience. Their TIC journey is shaped by exhaustion, health tolls, and systemic scarcity, but it eventually serves as a powerful catalyst for professional evolution. After many sacrifices, the plain teacher transforms into a multifaceted leader who develops a sense of mastery, finally finding the role not only manageable but deeply rewarding.

#### *From "Plain Teacher" to Institutional Leader*

Participants describe a radical expansion of their professional capabilities. Lira reflects on how the role forced her to grow beyond the four walls of a single classroom:

*"Big impact gida ro TIC hay nagkaroon it growth sang trabaho, plain teacher ka eating dati. Ga manage eata it room. Pero kung TIC ka abi hay malawak imong na ubra."  
(The impact of being a TIC is really big because it contributed to the growth of my work. Before, I was just a plain teacher managing only my classroom, but when I became a TIC, my responsibilities widened.)*

This growth is marked by new management and problem-solving skills, Lira continues:

*"Nagkantiguhan ako mag-handle it iskuylahan, mag-atubang sa ibang tawo, tapos mag-solve it problem... Nag-antiguhan ako mag-manage ag mag-lead."  
(I learned how to manage the school, how to face and deal with other people, and how to solve problems... I learned how to manage and how to lead.)*

Multigrade teaching environments serve as accidental leadership, as posited by Rotas (2021). This case reflects that educators develop higher-order administrative competencies faster than their monograde counterparts. This transformation is not measured in tasks but in professional identity—when the teacher begins to see school as a holistic system rather than just a collection of classrooms.

#### *Mastery of Objectives: "Bukon man it Malisod" (Not Difficult)*

Eventually, when the system of mastery is established, TICs realize that the complexity of the role is not inherently "hard". The workload is manageable through consistent preparation and instructional clarity, as Amihan describes:

*"Kaya manami bukon man it malisod magturo sa multigrade, imo eang nga istudyhan ro objectives adlaw-adlaw."  
(So, it is good. It is not really that difficult to teach in a multigrade class. You just have to study the objectives every day.)*

This transformation reflects Lariosa et al.'s (2022) observation of Philippine multigrade teachers developing a high degree of Self-Efficacy. The perceived weight of the dual role diminishes after the teacher masters the curriculum's daily objectives, indicating that the difficulty of the role is not a fixed state but a manageable variable dependent on the educator's pedagogical preparation and mental framing.

#### *Widened Perspectives and Self-Actualization*

Despite the physical and psychological exhaustion, the struggle of balancing two roles eventually leads to a broadened understanding of the educational system. The dual role provided a vantage point that standard teaching could not offer. Alena emphasizes this point:

*"My being TIC widen my perspective in terms of leading and managing my school."*

For Danaya, her experience taught her the infinite capacity for human adaptation. Reflecting on her 30-year journey, she speaks with a sense of triumph:

*"I have learned that everything can be learned. Struggle maybe experienced at first, but in the long run, you will get used to the dynamics... it make you feel the strength and undaunted will to be of service."*

This capacity is called the ART Framework: Adaptation, Resilience, and Thriving. Literal and Sabud (2025) argue that thriving in a multigrade setting occurs when the educator moves past the "trial-and-error" stage and derives personal meaning from their expanded influence. When that shift happens, the TIC no longer views the administrative burdens as interruptions but as an avenue for Vocational Actualization or growing into the full scope of who they are as educators.

#### *The Return to Vocation and the Love for the Role*

The TIC's journey may consist of struggle and adaptation, but it ultimately concludes with a reaffirmed love for the profession. TICs find joy in the results of their labor. Amihan captures this point, sharing that her ultimate motivation is her love for the learners, despite the toll of workload:

*"Maski masako uwa ko nalisdan hay naisip ko gid nga I love my work, I love my pupils."  
(Even if the workload is heavy, I do not feel that it is too difficult because I always remind myself that I love my work and I love my pupils.)*

This reaffirmed love for the work reflects Vocational Resilience (Day, 2019) which refers to the idea that teachers with the strong "moral purpose" find their work life-giving rather than draining. Aside from the strong sense of purpose, Solidarios (2025) noted that many TICs view their current hybrid role as an essential stepping stone for future administrative careers, like preparing for the National Qualifying Exam for School Heads (NQESH).

In the end, TIC is the ultimate survivor of the educational system through professional metamorphosis and vocational actualization. Their journey takes them from involuntary designation, through trial-and-error, and finally to mastery. Along the way, they became transformational leaders who turned struggle into a lifelong vocation and a source of daily joy.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The lived experiences of teachers-in-charge (TICs) in multigrade schools are fundamentally shaped by the convergence of instructional and administrative responsibilities within resource-constrained and geographically isolated contexts. The findings showed that entry into the TIC role is largely involuntary and driven by systemic necessity rather than deliberate professional preparation, resulting in immediate exposure to leadership responsibilities without structured induction. Participants navigated this transition through trial-and-error learning, self-directed adaptation, and reliance on localized coping strategies in the absence of sustained institutional support. Persistent resource scarcity, delayed or misaligned instructional materials, and geographic vulnerability further intensified the complexity of their dual roles, reinforcing the reality that multigrade TIC leadership is not only pedagogical but also logistical, relational, and survival-oriented in nature.

The study further demonstrated that the hybrid nature of the TIC role produces significant physiological and cognitive consequences. Participants reported chronic sleep deprivation, health-related concerns, and decision-making fatigue resulting from the constant need to shift between classroom instruction and administrative compliance. These overlapping demands disrupted instructional momentum and blurred professional boundaries between work and personal life, confirming that role convergence in multigrade contexts creates conditions of sustained occupational strain. At the same time, the findings highlighted how relational diplomacy with parents, local officials, and community stakeholders functioned as a critical support mechanism that enabled TICs to maintain institutional stability and legitimacy despite limited structural assistance from the education system.

Despite these challenges, the experiences of the participants ultimately reflected a trajectory of professional transformation characterized by resilience, adaptive expertise, and vocational fulfillment. Over time, teachers developed leadership competencies, strengthened instructional confidence, and cultivated a broader understanding of school governance that extended beyond classroom practice. This progression illustrates that while the TIC role initially emerges as an imposed responsibility shaped by circumstance, it gradually becomes a site of professional growth and identity reconstruction. The findings therefore underscore the need for context-responsive intervention programs and sustained institutional support

mechanisms that recognize the dual instructional-administrative realities of multigrade TICs and strengthen their capacity as teacher-leaders in geographically isolated school communities.

## Acknowledgement

The authors express their heartfelt appreciation to the Department of Education, Division of Aklan, District of Madalag especially all multigrade teachers with the dual role as teachers in charge, who participated in this study. The same gratitude to Aklan State University College of Teacher Education for the nurturance in research.

## Funding

This research received no external funding from any public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agency, and no organization provided financial support for the conduct of the study, authorship, or publication of this article.

## Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

## Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study are available from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

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## Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.