INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES BULLETIN
ISSN: (E) 3007-1917 (P) 3007-1909
Volume 4, Issue 3, 2026

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES, ASSESSMENT PRACTICES, AND CHALLENGES IN MULTIGRADE CLASSROOMS AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL IN BALOCHISTAN, PAKISTAN

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23471343

Received	Accepted	Published
01 January 2026	17 March 2026	31 March 2026

ABSTRACT

Multigrade classrooms, in which one teacher instructs pupils from two or more grades at the same time, are a structural feature of primary education in rural Balochistan, yet little is known about how teachers teach and assess in them. This study examined the pedagogical strategies and assessment practices used by multigrade teachers and the challenges they face. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with 450 government primary school teachers from five regions of Balochistan (Quetta, Kalat, Makran, Sibi, and Zhob) selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected with an adapted structured questionnaire (Cronbach's α = .76–.84) and analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, and one-way ANOVA. Teachers most often reported using rotation or station models (71.1%), low-cost local materials (68.9%), and short oral checks (68.9%), whereas leveled materials (44.4%) and formal assessment tools such as rubrics and checklists (28.9%) were used much less. Insufficient in-service training and supervisory support (82.2%) and, at 80.0% each, a lack of leveled materials, heavy workload, and irregular attendance were the most widely reported challenges. Pedagogical strategy scores differed significantly by multigrade experience and by number of grades taught (both $p < .001$), perceived challenges were higher in rural than in semi-urban schools ($p < .001$), and assessment practices did not differ by professional qualification ($p = .092$). The findings portray resourceful teachers working within systemic constraints and point to leveled materials, practical assessment tools, targeted training, and supervisory support as priorities.

Keywords:

multigrade teaching, pedagogical strategies, assessment practices, instructional materials, teacher professional development, formative assessment, rural education

1. INTRODUCTION

Multigrade teaching refers to arrangements in which a single teacher is responsible for pupils from two or more official grade levels within the same classroom and instructional period (Mathot, 2001). The arrangement persists in many countries for two main reasons. Low population density and scattered settlements make it impractical to provide a separate teacher and classroom for every grade, and fiscal and administrative constraints discourage the closure of small community schools (Little, 2006; Siririka, 2018). Multigrade provision is therefore increasingly treated not as a temporary expedient but as a legitimate mode of schooling that calls for its own pedagogical, assessment, and teacher-support responses (Ares-Ferreirós et al., 2025; Kardaş İşler, 2022).

In Pakistan, multigrade classes are a familiar feature of government primary schools,

particularly in rural, low-enrolment settings, where teachers must prepare parallel lesson sequences, manage groups working at different levels, and carry administrative duties at the same time (Fatima et al., 2024). Studies of education in Balochistan describe persistent quality and resourcing challenges (Ahmed et al., 2025; Ullah et al., 2024), and research on multigrade primary schools in the province reports adverse implications for teacher performance (Qayoom et al., 2024). The province's large area, dispersed population, and shortage of teachers make multigrade classrooms a common arrangement, yet the everyday classroom practice of these teachers has received little survey-based attention.

Much of the wider literature has focused on single-grade classes in urban, better-resourced settings, and it says little about how multigrade teachers in rural, under-resourced, and geographically dispersed contexts organise instruction, assess learning, and cope with constraints. This study addresses that gap through a survey of multigrade primary teachers across Balochistan.

Research Objectives

1:To identify the pedagogical strategies commonly used by teachers in multigrade classrooms at the primary level of Balochistan.

2:To examine the assessment practices teachers apply to evaluate student learning in these classrooms.

3:To determine the challenges teachers face in implementing pedagogy and assessment in multigrade classrooms.

Research Questions

1:What pedagogical strategies are most frequently used by teachers in multigrade classrooms at the primary level of Balochistan?

2:What assessment practices do teachers commonly apply to measure student learning in these classrooms?

3:What challenges do teachers most commonly report in implementing pedagogy and assessment in multigrade classrooms?

The study also tested whether strategy use, assessment practice, and perceived challenges differ by teachers' experience, number of grades taught, professional qualification, and school location. The findings are intended to inform teacher training, resource provision, and policy for multigrade schools.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Pedagogical strategies in multigrade classrooms

Research across a range of contexts identifies a small repertoire of practical strategies on which multigrade teachers rely. In remote Philippine schools, for example, teachers used classroom management routines, collaborative tasks, differentiated activities, links to everyday life, and flexibility to keep several grade groups engaged (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021). Rotation or station models are among the most commonly described arrangements: the teacher schedules short, time-bound activities for different groups and moves between them, combining brief whole-class input with group work, independent modules, and peer tutoring (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021; Potane & Recla, 2024). Peer tutoring benefits both tutors and tutees, and a meta-analysis of peer tutoring in mathematics reported positive effects on achievement (Alegre-Ansuategui et al., 2018). Modular or leveled materials allow teachers to assign work appropriate to each grade group (Chan et al., 2021), and teaching materials are central to how multigrade classrooms function (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024).

2.2 Assessment practices

Formative assessment, meaning frequent, low-stakes checks that teachers use to adapt instruction, improves learning when embedded in everyday routines (Black & Wiliam, 1998), and it suits multigrade settings where learners' readiness varies. Multigrade teachers typically use short oral probes, brief written tasks at different levels, observation notes, and simple checklists (Fatima et al., 2024; Naparan & Alinsug, 2021). A classroom-based comparison found higher scores on some dimensions of formative assessment practice in multigrade than in single-grade classrooms (Cerón Urzúa et al., 2024). At the same time, the most frequently reported barriers are limited time for planning and marking, a shortage of leveled assessment tools, and limited training in using diagnostic information (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021; Potane & Recla, 2024). Where preparation has been

tailored to multigrade realities, it has improved prospective teachers' knowledge, planning skills, and confidence (Şahin et al., 2022).

2.3 Challenges and context

A systematic review of recent international studies highlights recurring constraints in multigrade teaching, including insufficient planning time, heavy workloads, and a lack of context-sensitive professional development (Ares-Ferreirós et al., 2025). Pakistani field studies describe teachers resorting to whole-class, teacher-centred instruction when planning time is scarce, which reduces the use of peer tutoring and modular tasks (Fatima et al., 2024). In Balochistan, these pressures are compounded by limited supervisory capacity, material shortages, and seasonal variation in attendance, but empirical evidence on teachers' practice at provincial scale remains limited.

2.4 Conceptual framework

The study draws on four complementary perspectives. Constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) supports learning at the learner's own level and pace, which in turn calls for differentiation (Tomlinson, 2014). Peer tutoring and collaborative group work are consistent with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), and the assessment variable is informed by assessment for learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998), which emphasises formative assessment that informs teaching. Pedagogical strategies and assessment practices are treated as the main influences on student learning, with contextual factors, namely resource availability, teacher training, and classroom challenges, shaping how far these practices can be implemented.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was used. This design allowed the frequency of particular strategies, assessment practices, and challenges to be measured and compared across groups of teachers, and it kept each part of the instrument aligned with the research objectives.

3.2 Population and sample

The target population comprised government school teachers in Balochistan responsible for teaching two or more grades in the same classroom, estimated to number more than two thousand. A sample of 450 government primary school teachers currently engaged in multigrade teaching was selected through non-probability convenience sampling, chosen for its practicality in reaching teachers dispersed across remote and semi-urban districts within the study's time and resource limits. Respondents came from Quetta (n = 120, 26.7%), Kalat (n = 100, 22.2%), Makran (Turbat; n = 90, 20.0%), Sibi (n = 70, 15.6%), and Zhob (n = 70, 15.6%). Participants had to be current government school teachers in multigrade classrooms who were willing to give informed consent. Incomplete questionnaires and those with clearly inconsistent answers were removed before analysis. The target size was informed by standard guidance on sample sizes for educational research (Gay et al., 2012; Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

3.3 Instrument

Data were collected with a structured questionnaire adapted from instruments used in earlier multigrade studies (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021; Potane & Recla, 2024), with items reworded for clarity and local relevance. It had four parts: demographic information (eight items) and three scales rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*): pedagogical strategies (7 items), assessment practices (6 items), and challenges in multigrade teaching (7 items). Three specialists in education and research methodology reviewed the first draft for content validity, and ambiguous items were modified or deleted on their advice. Internal consistency was acceptable to good for all three scales (Table 1).

Table 1. Internal Consistency of the Questionnaire Scales

Scale	No. of items	Cronbach's α
Pedagogical strategies	7	.81
Assessment practices	6	.76
Challenges in multigrade teaching	7	.84

Note. Cronbach's α values were obtained in pilot testing of the instrument.

3.4 Procedure and ethical considerations

The questionnaire was administered online through a web-based form, with invitations sent through district networks. The form opened with an information statement and a request for consent explaining that participation was voluntary and anonymous. Participants could withdraw without penalty, and no personal identifiers were collected. Duplicate entries were screened, and records with large amounts of missing data were removed. Data were stored securely and used only for academic purposes. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from Alhamd Islamic University, and procedures followed institutional and national ethical guidelines.

3.5 Data analysis

Data were analysed in SPSS. Frequencies and percentages summarised respondent characteristics and item responses, and means and standard deviations were computed for each item on the five-point scale. For presentation, "disagree" combines *strongly disagree* and *disagree*, and "agree" combines *agree* and *strongly agree*. Section scores were calculated as the mean of the items in each section. One-way ANOVA compared section scores across groups defined by experience, number of grades taught, professional qualification, and school location, with a significance level of .05. Effect sizes were expressed as η^2 (between-groups sum of squares divided by the total sum of squares).

4. Results

4.1 Respondent profile

Respondents were mostly male (66.7%) and aged 25 to 44 (71.1%). Most held a bachelor's or master's degree (88.8%), and B.Ed. was the most common professional qualification (33.3%). Multigrade experience was 2–5 years for 31.1% and more than ten years for 40.0%. Two thirds taught two or three grades together (66.7%), and most worked in rural schools (71.1%).

4.2 Pedagogical strategies (RQ1)

Rotation or station models (71.1%) and low-cost local materials (68.9%) were the most used strategies (Table 2). Pace adjustment (60.0%), differentiated tasks (58.9%), and group work (58.9%) followed, while peer tutoring reached 51.1%. Modular or leveled materials were least used (44.4%).

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Table 2. Teachers' Responses on Pedagogical Strategies (N = 450)

Item	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	*M*
Rotation/station model	11.1	17.8	71.1	3.87
Differentiated tasks	14.4	26.7	58.9	3.64
Structured peer tutoring	20.0	28.9	51.1	3.42
Modular/leveled materials	24.4	31.1	44.4	3.27
Pace and content adjustment	15.6	24.4	60.0	3.62
Group work across grades	13.3	27.8	58.9	3.61
Low-cost local materials	8.9	22.2	68.9	3.84

Note. Disagree = strongly disagree + disagree; Agree = agree + strongly agree. *M* is the mean on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

4.3 Assessment practices (RQ2)

Short oral checks were the most common practice (68.9%), followed by leveled written tasks and combined formative and summative assessment (60.0% each; Table 3). Record-keeping (52.2%) and assessment-based grouping (48.9%) were less common, and only 28.9% had access to rubrics or leveled checklists (M = 2.78, below the scale midpoint).

Table 3. Teachers' Responses on Assessment Practices (N = 450)

Item	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	*M*
Short oral checks	11.1	20.0	68.9	3.83
Leveled written tasks	13.3	26.7	60.0	3.69
Simple record-keeping	16.7	31.1	52.2	3.52
Assessment-based grouping	20.0	31.1	48.9	3.40
Rubrics/leveled checklists	44.4	26.7	28.9	2.78
Formative and summative use	15.6	24.4	60.0	3.62

Note. Disagree = strongly disagree + disagree; Agree = agree + strongly agree. M is the mean on a five-point scale.

4.4 Challenges in multigrade teaching (RQ3)

Every challenge was endorsed by most teachers (Table 4). Insufficient training and supervision ranked highest (82.2%), followed by lack of leveled materials, heavy workload, and irregular attendance (80.0% each). Figure 1 summarises agreement across all items.

Table 4. Teachers' Responses on Challenges in Multigrade Teaching (N = 450)

Item	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	*M*
Lack of leveled materials	6.7	13.3	80.0	4.13
Workload and administrative duties	8.9	11.1	80.0	4.12
Irregular attendance	6.7	13.3	80.0	4.16
Insufficient training/supervision	6.7	11.1	82.2	4.20
Physical constraints	11.1	17.8	71.1	3.91
Large class size	8.9	15.6	75.6	4.01
Limited parental support	15.6	22.2	62.2	3.69

Note. Disagree = strongly disagree + disagree; Agree = agree + strongly agree. M is the mean on a five-point scale.

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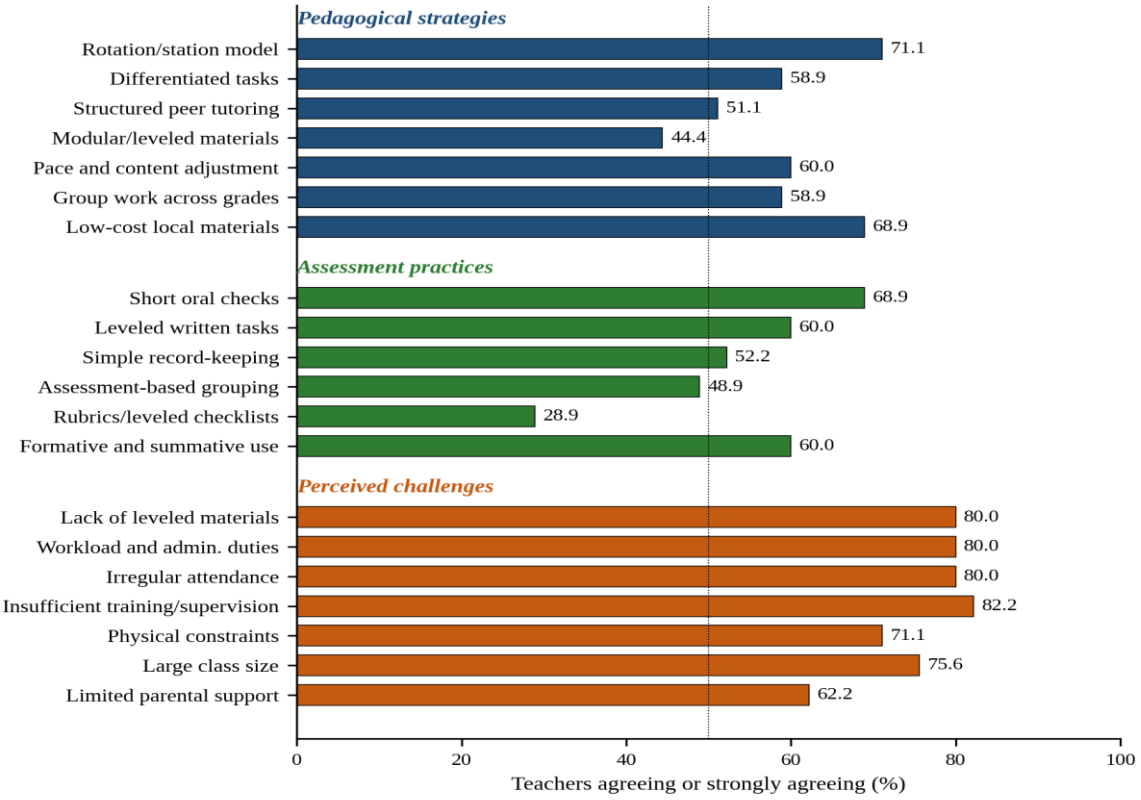


Figure 1. Percentage of Teachers Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing With Each Item
Note. N = 450. The dotted line marks 50%.

4.5 Group comparisons

One-way ANOVA results are summarised in Table 5. Pedagogical strategy scores differed significantly by experience in multigrade teaching, $F(3, 446) = 8.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .057$, and by the number of grades taught in the same classroom, $F(3, 446) = 10.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .067$. Both effects were small to moderate. Assessment practice scores did not differ significantly by professional qualification, $F(4, 445) = 2.01$, $p = .092$, $\eta^2 = .018$. Perceived challenges were significantly higher among rural than semi-urban teachers, $F(1, 448) = 21.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .046$, but did not differ by total teaching experience, $F(3, 446) = 1.49$, $p = .216$, $\eta^2 = .010$.

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA Results for Group Comparisons

Dependent variable	Grouping variable	SS between	SS within	*df*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Pedagogical strategies	Multigrade experience	18.72	312.45	3, 446	8.91	< .001	.057
Pedagogical strategies	Number of grades taught	22.18	308.99	3, 446	10.67	< .001	.067
Assessment practices	Professional qualification	5.89	325.11	4, 445	2.01	.092	.018
Perceived challenges	School location	15.33	319.45	1, 448	21.54	< .001	.046
Perceived challenges	Total teaching experience	3.25	331.53	3, 446	1.49	.216	.010

Note. SS = sum of squares; η^2 = SS between / SS total.

5. Discussion

This study examined how multigrade primary teachers in Balochistan organise instruction, assess learning, and experience constraints. Teachers appear resourceful: most use rotation or station models, adapt pace and content, and make their own low-cost materials. Their practice is, however, held back by thin material, assessment, and training support.

Pedagogical strategies

The widespread use of rotation or station models (71.1%) agrees with descriptions of effective multigrade practice elsewhere (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021; Potane & Recla, 2024), and the pattern of flexible pacing, group work, and peer support is consistent with the view of the multigrade teacher as a facilitator who groups learners flexibly (Bunga et al., 2025). These practices fit constructivist and differentiated-instruction thinking, in which learners work at their own level and pace (Tomlinson, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). The heavy reliance on low-cost local materials (68.9%) suggests that teachers compensate for scarce standard resources by improvising. The weak point is the limited use of modular or leveled materials (44.4%), set against the 80.0% who said a lack of leveled materials limits differentiation. This points to a gap between pedagogical intent and available material support, a gap noted in work on teaching materials in multigrade schools (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024). Without such materials, teachers may fall back on teacher-directed instruction, as Pakistani field studies describe (Fatima et al., 2024).

Assessment practices

Teachers relied mainly on quick oral checks (68.9%) and brief leveled written tasks (60.0%). Such rapid formative checks suit multigrade classrooms because they let a teacher monitor several learning streams without large formal tests (Black & Wiliam, 1998; OECD, 2005). The supporting infrastructure was weaker. Only 28.9% had access to rubrics or leveled checklists, and about half kept simple records (52.2%) or used results to form groups and plan lessons (48.9%). Much of the information teachers gather may therefore not be recorded or turned into differentiated plans. The pattern fits earlier reports that multigrade teachers lack time, assessment tools, and training in using diagnostic information (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021; Potane & Recla, 2024), and it suggests that the formative strengths multigrade teaching can foster (Cerón Urzúa et al., 2024) need practical tools and guidance to be realised.

Challenges

About four in five teachers identified inadequate training and supervision, a lack of leveled materials, heavy workload, and irregular attendance as major constraints, which corroborates international reviews that point to materials, training, and structural conditions as the main determinants of multigrade success (Ares-Ferreirós et al., 2025; Potane & Recla, 2024). Rural teachers reported greater difficulty than semi-urban teachers, consistent with the compounded disadvantages of rural schools, such as isolation, weaker supply of materials, and less access to professional development. Challenges did not differ by total teaching experience, which suggests that they are systemic rather than concentrated among novices, and that years in service do not offset a lack of support (Shareefa et al., 2020).

Group differences

Strategy scores varied with experience in multigrade teaching and with the number of grades taught, though the effects were small to moderate. A plausible reading is that familiarity with multigrade contexts builds context-specific routines and that managing more grades requires more varied classroom organisation. Because group means and post hoc comparisons were not examined, the direction and pattern of these differences remain to be established. Assessment practice did not differ by professional qualification. Formal qualifications may not include training in multigrade assessment, and the finding suggests that in-service training and practical tools are more promising routes to better assessment than higher qualifications alone (OECD, 2005).

Implications and limitations

The findings are consistent with a view of multigrade quality as shaped by individual (teacher experience), institutional (materials, workload), and systemic (training, supervision, policy) factors, which implies that classroom-

level effort alone will not close the gaps identified. Three practical priorities follow: affordable leveled materials and simple assessment rubrics; short school-based professional development on station management, peer tutoring, and quick formative checks; and protected planning time through streamlined administrative duties.

Several limitations should be noted. Convenience sampling and an online format limit generalisation beyond the respondents and may under-represent teachers with poor connectivity. The data are teachers' self-reports and were not verified through observation, and students, head teachers, and supervisors were not surveyed. The sample was predominantly male and rural. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, and the ANOVA results are reported without group means or post hoc tests. Future research could combine surveys with classroom observation and interviews, and test the effect of packaged leveled materials and brief training on student outcomes.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Multigrade teachers in Balochistan use a range of adaptive strategies, including rotation or station models, flexible pacing, group work, peer tutoring, and locally made materials, and they rely on oral and brief written checks to monitor learning. Their effectiveness is limited by a lack of leveled materials, formal assessment tools, and targeted training, by heavy workloads and irregular attendance, and especially in rural schools. Pedagogical practice varied with multigrade experience and the number of grades taught, but assessment practice was not related to professional qualification. Quality multigrade education therefore depends on addressing material, training, and administrative constraints. Based on the findings, the study recommends that education authorities:

1. develop and distribute affordable, leveled instructional materials (packets, worksheets, readers) designed for multigrade use;
2. provide school-based professional development on station rotation, peer tutoring, and the use of local materials;
3. supply simple assessment tools, such as rubrics and leveled checklists, and build formative techniques (oral checks, quick written tasks, observation checklists) into in-service training;
4. reduce administrative and non-teaching duties to protect planning time and establish regular classroom-based mentoring and supervision focused on multigrade pedagogy; and
5. develop community engagement strategies to improve attendance and parental support, particularly in rural areas.

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