

Transformative Teacher Learning Through Action Research: An Appreciative Inquiry into Multigrade Educators' Professional Growth

John Paul S. Medrano¹ , Maria Efrelij J. Cuadra² , Catherine C. Salvo^{3*} 

¹Integrated Based Education-Grade School, San Isidro College Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines; ²Development Communication Department, ³Business Administration Department, Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines

*catherinesalvo@buksu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Action research is increasingly recognized as a tool for enhancing instructional practice and professional development. This study explored the outcomes of an action research training program designed for multigrade teachers in Bukidnon, Philippines. The study aimed to: (1) identify the strengths and best practices of the training; (2) determine teachers envisioned ideal capacities; (3) co-create context-responsive initiatives; and (4) explore the outcomes in pedagogy, research practice, and professional development. A qualitative design employing appreciative inquiry (AI) was used. Data were collected through in-depth interviews from three purposively selected multigrade teachers who completed the training and supplemented by document analysis. Thematic analysis guided the interpretation of data based on the AI 4D cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. The study revealed that in the Discovery phase, key themes included learner-centered facilitation, trainer competence, personal growth, and the practical relevance of action research. In the Dream phase, teachers envisioned themselves as problem-solvers focused on holistic learner development and lifelong learning. The Design phase emphasized the need for institutional policy support, continuous capacity building, and integration of Artificial Intelligence tools to streamline the research process. Finally, the Destiny phase revealed outcomes such as enhanced pedagogical practices, increased research confidence and motivation, and the creation of professional development pathways. The study concluded that context-responsive training transforms multigrade teachers into reflective, innovative educators. Sustained mentoring, institutional support, and technology integration are essential to deepen these gains and advance SDG 4 on Quality Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Action research in education is recognized for enhancing the professional practices of teachers and administrators and is regarded positively by many educators for addressing educational challenges (Lufungulo et al., 2021). In multigrade classrooms where a single teacher manages students of different grade levels simultaneously, pedagogical competence and innovation are even more critical. Empowering teachers with the skills to conduct action research is essential for sustainable educational reform, especially in multigrade instruction, where complexities in classroom management and student diversity are heightened. Action research enables educators to reflect on their practices, test interventions critically, and make data-informed decisions to enhance student outcomes (Mertler, 2021). All these efforts contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 4, Quality Education, which is considered an essential element for success and provides a wealth of

opportunities, enabling everyone to contribute positively to a healthy and forward-thinking society.

Numerous studies have documented the transformative impact of action research on teaching practices. Positive transformations include increased self-awareness, growth in teaching efficacy, improved problem-solving, and enhanced autonomous learning (Cabaroglu, 2014). Action research fosters development of innovative and effective intervention programs that directly support high-quality classroom instruction (Oestar & Marzo, 2022). It is widely recognized as a critical component of professional growth, catalyzing innovation, educational reform, and added value resulting from teachers' creative initiatives (Hamada, 2019). Furthermore, Albalawi and Johnson (2022) emphasized that action research is vital in advancing educational practices, improving the learning environment, and addressing students' academic and behavioral challenges.

Globally, action research has gained traction as a practical professional development model. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) have made conducting research one of the key professional development activities for educators (Ulla, 2018). A study conducted in Bukidnon found that time management was one of the difficulties faced by the teachers who participated in action research. Additionally, participants struggled with creating the content and adhering to the format. The study recommended establishing a mentorship program to enhance the teachers' research skills (Paraiso et al., 2025).

The results of the study of Saro and Taray (2024) showed that although teachers were generally competent and enthusiastic about action research, there were many issues, including time constraints, a lack of support, and the complexity of the research process. The study also found that teachers' knowledge of research methodology and problem-solving skills were strongly correlated with their participation in action research. Teachers faced challenges in conducting research, were frequently left alone in multigrade classrooms, and struggled to ensure classroom management and to carry out the teaching-learning process (Kalender & Erdem, 2021). Another study revealed that teachers were overburdened with work, which made it harder to find time for research. They also do not have enough money for action research and support from educational institutions to help make it possible (Caabas et al., 2024).

To address these challenges experienced by teachers in conducting action research, the College of Education, Bachelor of Elementary Education at Bukidnon State University, implemented the extension project on Enhancing DepEd Teachers' Action Research Capabilities on Multigrade Instruction in the K to 12 Classroom with the Department of Education, Division of Malaybalay, as the cooperator. This project aimed to equip teachers with the necessary skills, guidance, and motivation to engage in action research successfully, geared towards the K to 12 curriculum, through conducting seminar-workshops and training, and producing contextualized instructional materials.

While the project was implemented to provide capacity-building support, there is limited empirical evidence on how such interventions have influenced the teachers' research engagement, classroom practices, and professional growth. Despite the growing importance of action research as a transformative tool for professional development and classroom improvement, significant challenges hinder its effective implementation. Potential gaps in educators' training and readiness to do research in educational contexts are highlighted by the research knowledge difficulties (Amenabar & Pontillas, 2024). These challenges are further compounded in multigrade classrooms, where teachers manage diverse learners with minimal assistance. Although initiatives have begun addressing these issues through training and mentoring, there is still limited empirical evidence on the actual outcomes of such interventions, particularly from the perspective of the teachers involved.

To address this gap, this study explored the outcomes of the extension project titled "Enhancing DepEd Teachers' Action Research Capability on Multigrade Instruction in the K to 12 Classroom". It specifically seeks to identify the strengths and best practices conducted by Bukidnon State University's (BukSU) extension project to build action research competencies among multigrade teachers (discovery); determine how DepEd multigrade teachers envision their ideal capacity in conducting action research (dream); co-create actionable and context-responsive initiatives that can further strengthen the action research skills of multigrade teachers based on their aspirations and identified needs (design); and explore the outcomes of the action research training on multigrade teachers' instructional strategies, research practices, and professional development (destiny).

By investigating these dimensions through the appreciative inquiry framework, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on teacher development and action research in multigrade settings. It provides valuable insights for policymakers, teacher educators, and educational leaders seeking to strengthen research-informed teaching and

promote quality education in diverse and resource-constrained learning environments.

Framework of the Study

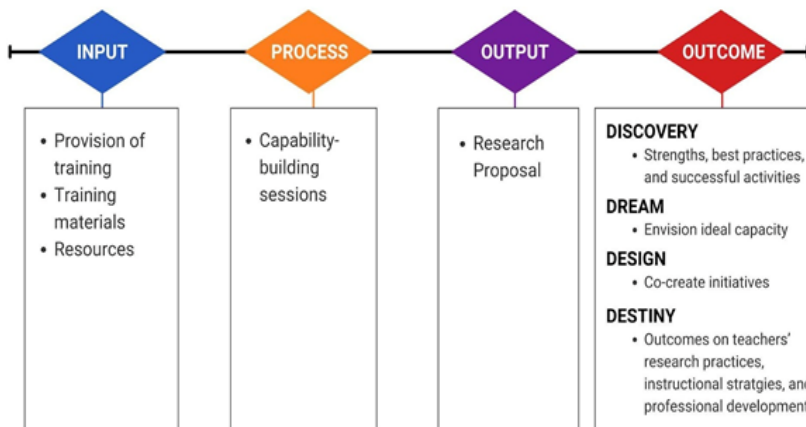
The study was anchored on the theory of change (ToC), which provides a comprehensive explanation of how and why a desired transformation is expected to occur within a particular context. The Theory of Change is especially valuable for evaluating complex educational interventions, such as teacher capacity-building initiatives, as it systematically identifies the necessary preconditions, pathways, and measurable indicators required to achieve long-term goals (Anderson, 2005). By mapping the logical sequence from inputs and activities to outcomes and impact, the ToC framework guided the design, implementation, and evaluation of the action research training program for multigrade teachers. It also helped in assessing the alignment between the intervention strategies and the intended changes in research practices, instructional quality, and professional development. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study.

capability-building initiatives. The training sessions were carefully designed to address the unique challenges encountered in multigrade teaching, ensuring that the content is both relevant and practical.

The process component highlighted the way multigrade teachers engage with and absorb the knowledge and skills presented during the extension activities. This stage involved active participation in workshops, hands-on activities, mentoring sessions, and collaborative learning experiences facilitated by the extensionists. Teachers eventually gain expertise and confidence in creating research-based strategies to enhance their teaching practices as they work through this process. The dynamic interaction between extensionists and participants fosters an environment of continuous learning and professional growth.

The output of the extension project is manifested in the research proposals crafted by the multigrade teachers. These proposals served as tangible evidence of the knowledge and skills they have acquired throughout the

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework of the Study using the Theory of Change



The inputs for this study encompassed a range of support mechanisms designed to empower multigrade teachers through targeted extension activities. These inputs include the provision of specialized training programs, well-crafted training materials, and essential resources necessary for the effective implementation of

capability-building sessions. The ability to develop well-structured and relevant research proposals demonstrates the teachers' enhanced understanding of educational issues and their commitment to addressing them through systematic inquiry.

The outcomes of the project were patterned according to the 4Ds of appreciative inquiry. The discovery phase focuses on identifying the existing strengths and best practices conducted by Bukidnon State University's extensionists. The goal is to uncover what works well, such as successful research experiences, effective collaboration, contextualized innovations, or supportive learning environments. This phase emphasizes teacher competencies and motivations and facilitates situations that support action research, creating a constructive basis for subsequent advancement.

In the dream phase, the teachers articulate their ideal capacity and role in conducting action research. This includes envisioning a future where teachers are fully equipped, supported, and empowered to conduct meaningful action research that addresses instructional challenges. The dream phase allowed participants to imagine transformative possibilities beyond current limitations, creating a shared vision of excellence in teacher-led inquiry and reflective practice.

Based on the strengths discovered and the visions articulated, the design phase focuses on crafting actionable and context-responsive initiatives and strategies to enhance action research capabilities among multigrade teachers. These included targeted capacity-building programs, mentoring structures, peer collaboration models, access to research funding, and integration of action research into institutional planning. The design phase guarantees that the aspirations from the dream phase are anchored in feasible and attainable initiatives.

The final phase, destiny, evaluated the outcomes and sustainability of the training program on teachers' professional lives. It examined the outcomes of action research training on their research practices, instructional strategies, and overall professional growth. The Destiny phase reflected on the progress made and ensured that the outcomes are embedded into the system, allowing for continuous growth and ownership by the teachers. It provided a trajectory for long-term educational reform, aligned with the goals of DepEd and the

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Quality Education.

METHODS

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized appreciative inquiry as the research methodology. Appreciative inquiry is a strength-based, participatory approach that identifies and builds upon existing best practices, positive experiences, and successful outcomes (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). This method is particularly suited to educational settings where the goal is transformation and empowerment.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants of the study were three multigrade teachers from the Department of Education Division of Malaybalay who completed the training under the Extension Project on Enhancing Action Research Capabilities. In the study of Ahmed (2025), the recommended sample size for narrative inquiry is 3 to 10 narratives. The study of Davis (2018) collected three interview sources for appreciative inquiry. Sampling practices in appreciative inquiry typically vary depending on the case, ranging from one-on-one interviews with a small sample of 10 to interviews with the entire organization (Wu et al., 2024). Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with the inclusion criteria of having prior experience and engagement with the action research training and being a multigrade teacher. Those individuals who did not qualify under the specified criteria were excluded from participation in this study. Participants who did not voluntarily consent to participate in the study were also excluded. For the recruitment, the researchers coordinated with the faculty extensionists to identify the participants of the study. Communication letters were sent to the identified multigrade teachers. Consent forms were distributed to the multigrade teachers, ensuring participants understood their scope of involvement. Teachers who agreed to participate were scheduled for the 30–40-minute individual interview sessions at a convenient time and venue. There were only three out of

10 participants who agreed to be interviewed.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved two main approaches: in-depth interviews and document analysis. The in-depth interviews aimed to capture the personal experiences, perceptions, and insights of teachers regarding their action research journey. The interviews explored four stages aligned with the 4D cycle of appreciative inquiry: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. During the discovery phase, participants were asked to reflect on and identify the strengths, successful experiences, and enabling conditions that supported their involvement in action research. In the dream phase, teachers were requested to share their aspirations and ideal visions of themselves as competent action researchers. The design phase focused on the concrete strategies and plans co-created or adopted by the teachers to achieve the aspirations they expressed during the dream phase. Lastly, the destiny phase explored the sustainability and long-term impact of their learning. To complement the interviews, document analysis was conducted on evaluation forms and action research outputs developed by the participants as a result of their training. These documents served as tangible evidence of their learning, application, and innovation in the classroom context.

Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was an interview guide, which was validated by three experts in qualitative research and action research. The guide included open-ended questions aligned with each stage of the appreciative inquiry framework to elicit meaningful narratives about participants' experiences, aspirations, and changes in teaching practices, research capability, and professional development. The interview guide, which is organized around the 4D cycle of appreciative inquiry including discovery, dream, design, and destiny was intended to explore the experiences, aspirations, and outcomes of multigrade teachers who participated in the action research training program at Bukidnon State University. The interview guide is composed of 16 open-ended

questions, systematically aligned with the study's objectives to ensure rich, reflective, and actionable insights. For document analysis, evaluation forms that were completed by participants immediately after the training serve as a complementary data-gathering technique.

Incentives or Compensation

No monetary compensation was provided. However, participants were offered simple tokens during the interview sessions as a small gesture of appreciation for their time and contributions, particularly given the length of the interviews, which was 30 to 40 minutes.

Impact Dimensions and Indicator

Table 1 presents how the outcomes of the action research training among multigrade teachers were evaluated based on four impact domains.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method enabled the systematic identification of recurring patterns and themes within the qualitative data. The process involved six key steps. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the materials by going over interview scripts and pertinent documents several times to gain familiarity with the data. Second, researchers produced preliminary codes by identifying important data segments that match the objectives of the study. Third, the generated codes were arranged into possible themes that represented the shared experiences among the participants. Fourth, themes were reviewed and examined to ensure the accuracy of the data. Fifth, each theme was defined and named to ensure consistency and clarity. Sixth, using the framework of appreciative inquiry, the final themes were synthesized and interpreted. This approach facilitated a rich understanding of the outcomes of the action research training in the research practices, instructional strategies, and professional growth of multigrade teachers and identified future directions for support and capacity-building. Data triangulation was used by analyzing

information from action research outputs and training evaluation forms to corroborate findings and strengthen the validity of the emerging themes. Member checking was conducted by sharing the preliminary interpretations and themes with selected participants, allowing them to confirm the accuracy of their statements and offer clarifications or additional insights. Additionally, an audit trail was maintained throughout the study, documenting each step of the data collection, coding, theme development, and analytical decision-making.

of the study. Only those who voluntarily signed the consent form were included. Participation was entirely voluntary. Teachers had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or obligation to justify. Personal identifiers were removed from all transcripts and documents. Pseudonyms were used in reporting to protect participants' identities. All audio recordings and digital files were stored securely and accessible only to the research team. All data were handled in accordance with ethical data management standards. Files were encrypted and stored in password-protected folders. Data

Table 1
Impact Domain Evaluation

Impact Domain	Definition	Sample Indicators	Data Source
1. Capacity-Building	Improvements in teachers' knowledge, skills, confidence, and self-efficacy in action research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Number of research proposals produced. Self-reported improvement in research confidence and competence 	Interviews, document analysis
2. Pedagogical Practice	Changes in instructional strategies and innovations in multigrade classrooms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Use of contextualized instructional materials Reported shifts in teaching methods Observed student engagement improvements 	Interviews, instructional outputs
3. Professional Development	Advancements in teachers' careers and self-perception as change agents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in mentoring others Engagement in scholarly activities Perceived professional identity transformation 	Interviews, career progress narratives
4. Social and Institutional Influence	Contributions to school culture and collaboration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of peer collaboration or mentoring models Perceived support from school leadership Integration into school improvement plans 	Interviews, focus group reports (if applicable)

Ethics Statement

To protect every participant's right, safety, and dignity, this research project was carried out strictly in compliance with accepted ethical norms. A number of important procedures were followed in accordance with institutional policies and ethical research principles. Participants were provided with a detailed informed consent form outlining the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits

will be retained only for the duration necessary to complete the research and reporting, after which it will be securely deleted. The research protocol was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of BukSU for ethical clearance prior to data collection. No data was collected until formal approval was obtained.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the study using the appreciative inquiry framework, which is structured into four phases: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Through this lens, the narratives and reflections of multigrade teachers who participated in the action research training organized by Bukidnon State University were explored to highlight strengths, aspirations, practical suggestions, and sustained impacts.

Table 2 presents the profile of respondents. The participants represented a diverse profile in terms of age, experience, and educational background within an educational context, likely involving multigrade teaching.

Table 2
Profile of Participants

Profile	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Age	25	59	28
Sex	Male	Female	Female
Highest Educational Attainment	Master's Degree	College Graduate, 52 units in MA	Bachelor's Degree
Years of Service	4 years	27 years	6 years
Multigrade levels handled	Grades 1 & 2	Grades 1 & 2	Grades 3 & 4

The ages of the participants span from 25 to 59, indicating a mix of early-career and highly seasoned professionals. While two were female and one was male, all have pursued higher education, ranging from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree, reflecting a commitment to their profession. Their years of service vary significantly, from 4 to 27 years, highlighting a blend of newer insights and extensive practical wisdom in handling multigrade levels, specifically Grades 1 & 2 and Grades 3 & 4.

Discovery: Strengths and Best Practices in Building Action Research Competence

Table 3 presents the strengths and best practices in conducting training on action research for multigrade teachers. The themes generated were (1) learner-centered facilitation, (2) trainer competence and support, (3) personal

growth and commitment, and (4) action research relevance.

Table 3
Strengths and Best Practices in Building Action Research Competence

Theme	Description
Learner-Centered Facilitation	Teachers appreciated the freedom to select relevant problems in their context, which made the training meaningful and relatable.
Trainer Competence and Support	Facilitators were praised for their clear and open communication, structured sessions, and ability to motivate.
Personal Growth and Commitment	Participants showed strong motivation, consistency, and commitment to applying what they learned.
Action Research Relevance	Teachers found the research practical and problem-solving oriented for real classroom needs.

Learner-Centered Facilitation

The learner-centered facilitation emphasized identification of context-specific problems, open sharing and supportive mentoring, and collaborative exploration. Learner-centered approaches emphasize the importance of creating learning opportunities that improve learning. According to participant no. 1,

"Since most of the teachers are from far-flung areas, they let us choose what problem we need to address."

Also, participant no. 3 noted that:

"The lecturers really listened to us, they were so open-minded and helpful. They want us to work hand-in-hand."

Trainer Competence and Support

For training and development programs to be successful, trainer support and competency are essential. Organizations may greatly increase the efficacy of their training programs and improve both individual and organizational performance by investing in the skill of their trainers as well as the infrastructure that supports

them. As Participant 1 shared:

"The lecturers were so knowledgeable, and they discussed each part of the action research. They explained all the necessary parts of the action research."

Participant 1 also added that:

"Since most of the teachers are from far-flung areas, they let us choose what problem we need to address, they gave us freedom to share our experiences and to share them to come up with solutions on how to deal with such problems through action research."

Participant 2 also expressed that:

"Even though I was hesitant at first, they encouraged me and made the process less intimidating."

Participant 3 added that:

"Our mentors from the university were helpful. They gave constructive feedback, which helped us improve our papers."

Personal Growth and Commitment

The theme on personal growth and commitment implies that the effectiveness of the training was not solely based on the learner-centered approach and trainer competence, but also on the internal drive and commitment of the participating teachers. As expressed by Participant 1,

"I am able to develop consistency since it is very challenging for us to attend seminars and meetings. Commitment to join the sessions. This could also be applied to research since we really need time and effort."

Participant 2 also articulated that:

"Despite my doubts, I joined all the sessions. I did not expect I would finish. Nevertheless, I did it."

Action Research Relevance

The training emphasized the relevance of action research for the multigrade teachers. Action research is fundamentally centered on

a problem-solving approach. The participation of multigrade teachers in the action research training empowered them to be the main innovators and diagnosticians for their particular classroom environments. Participant 2 conveyed that:

"As part of my research, if you compare the public-school pupils with the private school pupils, they really need teacher's attention, some of them are struggling readers so they need more follow-up, but because of my research, I was able to determine teaching strategies to address such challenges."

This phase highlights the strengths and best practices that emerged during the training. Teachers found value in the freedom to choose relevant classroom problems, praised the competence and support of trainers, and developed personal commitment to engage in research. Importantly, they saw action research as a relevant and practical tool to address real classroom issues.

For the document analysis, the strengths and best practices discovered were the conduct of needs assessment ensuring that the extension program responded to real, context specific challenges, the project team demonstrated strong organizational capacity and collaboration with DepEd partners, reflecting effective stakeholder engagement. Participant feedback consistently rated content quality, trainer competence, and training delivery as "best", with averages ranging from 4.69 to 5.00. Comments from the participants emphasized the practical relevance of the action research focus, especially in addressing learner diversity in multigrade classrooms.

Dream: Idealized Visions of Multigrade Teacher-Researchers

Teachers perceived themselves as change agents who could connect research and classroom practice in addition to solving problems. Multigrade teachers envisioned themselves as problem-solvers, focusing on learners' holistic development and advocating for lifelong learning. Table 4 shows the codes and themes for idealized visions of multigrade teacher-researchers.

Table 4
Idealized Vision of Multigrade Teacher-Researchers

Theme	Description
Teacher as Problem-Solver	Teachers envisioned themselves as proactive problem-solvers in and beyond the classroom.
Holistic Learner Development	Aspirations included addressing basic needs like food security and creating long-term solutions.
Lifelong Learning and Impact	Teachers saw research as a path to continuous development and social contribution.

Teacher as Problem-Solver

The extension project equips multigrade teachers to proactively and methodically tackle pressing, real-world issues in their distinct classroom and community settings. As problem-solvers, the multigrade teachers are more than just educators, they are responders to complex problems affecting the student’s learning and lives. Through the development of action research competencies, the training equips them with the tools to identify, investigate, and implement solutions to these issues. Participant 2 stated that:

“For me, since most of the children are deprived of food, if they are hungry during classes, they will not be able to learn, even adults, right? If I am going to ask the students if they have already eaten, they will answer “yes”, even if they are not. So, I will focus on health and food security for the children.”

While Participant 2 manifested that:

“If there are available funds, I want to focus on having audio-visual materials when we teach comprehension like for example they can really listen to sounds.”

Holistic Learner Development

The theme Holistic Learner Development covered community impact, home-school link, and technology integration that acknowledging the complex realities faced by learners in diverse settings. Participant 1 expressed that

“Since my topic is on feeding programs, I want it

not for short-term solutions but also to be able to apply that solution in their own home. If there is “gulayan” (gardening) in the school, I hope there will be “gulayan” in their homes. The children really want to learn, and the problem is that they do not have enough food. This will enhance not only their physical health but will also improve their well-being.”

Lifelong Learning and Impact

This study also revealed that multigrade teachers envision having a lifelong learning orientation. These teachers do not just teach, but aim to continuously learn, adapt, lead, and advocate for positive change in their classrooms and communities. Action research stimulates teachers’ awareness of the value of lifelong learning.

“As a teacher, you also need to be a lifelong learner. Action research is really a part of a teacher’s life. In the classroom, it is not always smooth sailing. There are really challenges, joy, and children have varied needs. That is why we need to be a researcher so that we have an impact on them, not just for now but will be used by them in the future. I want them to see me as a teacher who inspires them and will remind them that poverty is not a hindrance to success. One of the solutions for that is if I will research so that I can discover many things, and will be developed if there is continuous commitment to do research.”
[Participant 1]

“I want my action research to be something I can use not just now but in future classes as well.”
[Participant 3]

In the dream phase, participants envisioned their ideal capacities and impact as teacher-researchers. They saw themselves as proactive problem-solvers, envisioned broader learner development, and aspired to become lifelong learners who influence future generations through innovative research practices.

For the document analysis, in the Dream phase, the participants articulated aspirations in developing actionable research proposals to address community and learner needs. They also reflected on integrating action research into everyday classroom decisions and school improvement efforts. Most of the teachers

consider themselves as agents of change, expressing desire for broader impact, including systemic reforms and learner well-being.

Design: Co-creating Actionable, Context-Responsive Initiatives

In order to address educational difficulties, the design part highlights a cooperative and practical approach to co-create solutions with the individuals who will implement and benefit from them. These solutions are made to be relevant and particularly customized to meet the particular requirements and conditions of the local area. Table 5 depicts the codes and themes for the third D on appreciative inquiry, Design.

Table 5
Co-creating Actionable, Context-Responsive Initiatives

Theme	Description
Institutional Support and Policy	Teachers recommended institutionalizing action research with formal mandates and incentives.
Continuous Capacity Building	Participants valued peer and supervisor mentoring as a means to build confidence and clarity.
Tech Integration and Innovation	Teachers encouraged leveraging AI tools to ease the research process.

Institutional Support and Policy

Participants highlighted the importance of institutional support and policy, which includes DepEd memo requirement, recognition and funding support. This is a critical factor for the success and sustainability of the training on action research for multigrade teachers. The extension project on action research training likely aligns with existing DepEd mandates for teacher professional development or specific educational reforms. Participant 1 expounded that

"It should be a requirement for the teachers to conduct action research so that they will have personal and professional growth. Teachers need to be encouraged or there should be a "memo" so that the teachers will be encouraged and the teachers should have recognition. A budget is also needed in order to conduct research."

Continuous Capacity Building

For multigrade teachers, particularly those in diverse and often isolated settings, sustained support for skill enhancement and application is critical for embedding new practices like action research into their regular routines. The continuous capacity-building theme emphasizes that effective professional development is a continuous process that provides participants with the tools, resources, and knowledge they need to handle changing difficulties rather than a one-time event.

"Workshops like this should happen regularly. It helps refresh our understanding and pushes us to continue what we started." [Participant 2]

"It would be greatly beneficial if there were regular training seminar and workshop for the teachers. And there is a need for enhancement and continuous monitoring to realize the action research, and implement it" [Participant 3]

Tech Integration and Innovation

The theme on technology integration and innovation recognizes that technology can act as a force multiplier, amplifying the impact of action research by providing new ways to gather data, access information, design interventions, and deliver training. It signals a move towards future-proofing the skills of teachers in an increasingly digital world. Embracing Artificial Intelligence (AI), facilitating access to digital resources, prescribing lesson plans, and developing context-based training modules demonstrate important strategic orientation.

"There is already AI, so teachers need to make use of these AIs to minimize the burden for the teachers in conducting research. Seeking the help of AI can assist teachers who are challenged in conducting research. The program needs to have integration of AI technology." [Participant 1]

The design phase reflects teachers' co-created strategies and actionable recommendations to improve research engagement. These include policy-level support, regular capacity-building activities, and the incorporation of AI tools to support teacher

research processes.

For document analysis, for the Design phase, the project consisted of several training modules which were discussed via interactive online platforms since the implementation of the extension project was during the COVID-19 pandemic. A proposal mentoring session highlighted the personalized support provided to help teachers translate learning into concrete outputs.

Destiny: Long-Term Outcomes on Research Practice, Instructional Strategies, and Professional Growth

The Destiny phase is about the long-term outcomes, sustainability, and continuous evolution of the positive changes envisioned and designed in the preceding phases of Discovery, Dream, and Design.

Table 6 reveals the codes and themes for destiny, specifying the long-term outcomes of the extension project. The generated themes are enhanced pedagogical practices, increased confidence and motivation, and professional development pathways.

Table 6
Long-Term Outcomes on Instructional Strategies, Research Practice, and Professional Growth

Theme	Description
Enhanced Pedagogical Practices	Teachers began customizing strategies based on learners' needs and data.
Increased Confidence and Motivation	Teachers expressed greater belief in their ability to do research.
Professional Development Pathways	The training influenced promotions and encouraged teachers to inspire others.

Enhanced Pedagogical Practices

The long-term outcome for instructional strategies is enhanced pedagogical practices. This theme emphasizes a continuous evolution in teaching methods, driven by teacher-led inquiry, leading to more effective and responsive learning environments. Enhancing pedagogical practices involves more than just implementing

new methods but also entails changing the way that teaching is approached through systematic inquiry.

"As a teacher, I need to be a researcher or innovator in my class. Children have varied learning needs, so as a teacher, I need to be flexible and innovative, and a problem-solver. I am encouraged to research the appropriate innovations for every concern in my class. What tool shall I use to help me solve the identified problem? The training really helped me, because I need to discern what class problems need to be solved."
[Participant 2]

"The approach became more intentional... it shifted from one-size-fits-all."

Increased Confidence and Motivation

This theme on increased confidence and motivation indicates a shift from potential hesitation or apathy to a proactive, empowered, and enthusiastic engagement in conducting action research. This enhanced psychological state is vital for the sustained integration of action research into their daily professional lives, especially in the demanding context of multigrade classrooms. The ability to articulate the action component of their research, and see its direct impact, provides strong positive reinforcement, fostering continued motivation to engage in the research process.

"The impact of the training gave us motivation to do research. It encouraged us not to limit ourselves in the four-corners of the classroom. We should not be reluctant; we need to do research and think about how to provide solutions to address the problems in the classrooms." [Participant 2]

"I am more confident in conducting such."
[Participant 1]

Professional Development Pathways

The theme on professional development pathways highlights that the value of action research extends beyond immediate classroom improvements to directly impact a teacher's long-term career trajectory and commitment to the profession. Participating in research enhances their qualifications for higher positions and

incentivizes deeper engagement in professional growth.

"It should be a requirement for the teachers to conduct action research so that they will have personal and professional growth." [Participant 1]

"The training gave me new insights that I now apply in teaching and plan to use in future leadership roles." [Participant 3]

"The training challenged me not to be stagnant and not conduct research. The training really challenged me to continue learning and grow. If I will really implement the steps in conducting action research, it really gives me confidence to research because the lecturers are really willing to help." [Participant 2]

"I was promoted because of their help." [Participant 2]

This final phase captured the sustained outcomes of the training. Teachers reported improved instructional strategies, enhanced confidence in conducting research, and professional growth, including promotions and deeper engagement in continuous learning.

For document analysis, the Destiny phase revealed that based on the evaluation data, multigrade teachers gained confidence and competence in conducting action research. The participants submitted research proposals targeting classroom issues, and the majority expressed intent to implement research-based practices. The qualitative comments praised the relevance of the sessions, the speaker's expertise, and their increased capacity to engage in reflective and data-driven instruction.

DISCUSSION

The application of appreciative inquiry provided a structured yet flexible framework that illuminated both the immediate and long-term benefits of action research training among multigrade teachers.

In the Discovery phase, strengths such as learner-centered training design, action research relevance and supportive trainers fostered a

nurturing environment for teacher reflection and growth. One professional learning technique that is intended to be an integrated aspect of teachers' work is action research, which is grounded on teacher-identified areas and based on current research as well as teachers' experiences and contextual knowledge (Bergmark, 2020). Teachers from remote locations were able to apply theoretical concepts to their actual classroom circumstances and find their voices because of the training's learner-centered approach. As suggested by Abdelmalak and Trespalacios (2013), it would be more effective if lecturers adopt a learner-centered approach to teaching and focus on what and how participants are learning. Trainer competence and support also emerged as another theme in which the findings of the study of Andoh et al. (2022) revealed that if trainers lack pedagogical competence, training will not be effective. Aside from expert facilitators, lecturer guidance was also provided through mentoring and consultation sessions. Trainers made sure that the participants were able to share openly their challenges and helped them address those challenges.

The theme on personal growth and commitment is supported by the study of Santiago (2023) which disclosed that primary gain in doing action research is professional growth emphasizing self-improvement and reflection. Beyond mere participation, multigrade teachers were committed to attending the training sessions. Conducting action research stems from the sincere interest of the participants to develop new knowledge (Clark et al., 2020). Another theme emerged which is the relevance of action research. Teachers focus most effectively on issues that they have personally identified them (Aksel & Bozkus, 2022). The appropriate topic of inquiry in the action research is considered as the problems of practice, which is a problem encountered by a teacher in the professional practice (Mertler, 2021). When teachers are involved in identifying the research questions and problems, their engagement and the impact on their practice are profound.

In the Dream phase, teachers' aspirations were not only grounded in solving academic problems but also in promoting student well-being, integrating technology, and embracing

lifelong learning. Understanding the issues in the classroom allows the teacher to make innovations and solutions by analyzing the root causes and plan the best possible intervention to solve such problems (Oestar & Marzo, 2022). The extension project fosters action research competencies among multigrade teachers that leads to multifaceted growth of students. It effectively empowered teachers to initiate change that transcends purely academic outcomes. The theme Holistic Learner Development covered community impact, home-school link, and technology integration that acknowledging the complex realities faced by learners in diverse multigrade settings. Holistic development means equipping students with skills to communicate, resolve problems, create relationships, develop motor skills, and learn self-regulation (Lunga et al., 2022). This phase confirmed that when teachers are empowered through inquiry, they see the importance of lifelong learning. Teachers learn through action research, which areas they are proficient in and which ones require them to acquire new skills (Zajic et al., 2021).

The Design phase underscored the importance of system-wide and sustainable supports such as institutional support and policy, continuous capacity-building programs, and technological integration. Education actors are empowered to make positive changes for their classrooms and need institutional support and policy to maximize the impact (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2019). The continuous capacity-building theme finds support in the study of Samosa (2021) where it is recommended that continuous professional development focus concentrate on research capacity building to improve and fortify educators' abilities to write educational research to enhance the process of teaching and learning. For the theme on technology integration, the effectiveness of the integration depends on the willingness of the teachers (Rocha-Castillo et al., 2025).

Finally, the Destiny phase emphasized the training's long-term impacts on instructional quality, teacher confidence and motivation, and professional development. Multigrade teachers are consistently finding innovative, context-responsive, and resource-efficient ways to improve their teaching. Pedagogical decisions

are increasingly based on systematic inquiry and diagnostic data, leading to more targeted and effective interventions. Collaboration becomes an embedded practice, fostering shared learning and mutual support among multigrade teachers in their quest for better teaching. Action research enables teachers to acquire new knowledge and enhance educational practices (Hine, 2013). For the increased teachers' confidence and motivation, a clear understanding of the research structure provides a roadmap, reducing feelings of being overwhelmed by the complexity of research. Multigrade teachers view action research as a valuable part of their professional identity, demonstrating proactive engagement. Motivation of teachers to engage in action research include desire for enhancing student learning, professional development and career advancement (Engane & Gonzales, 2025). Action research also cultivates the capacity for systematic innovation. Teachers who are committed lifelong learners are better equipped to pursue promotions, engage in innovation, and adapt to evolving educational landscapes. Since action research indicates educational improvement and is connected to study into practical knowledge, it is crucial to teachers' professional growth (Ronen, 2020).

The findings of this study will serve as a foundation for enhancing teacher development initiatives within the Department of Education, particularly for those in multigrade settings. By integrating action research as a core component of professional development, teachers are empowered to investigate and address the specific challenges they face in diverse classroom contexts. Insights drawn from the appreciative inquiry and thematic analysis will be used to inform policy recommendations aimed at institutionalizing mentoring programs, integrating action research into teachers' workload, and allocating support resources such as funding and time allowances. To support practical application, training modules and action research toolkits will be developed, drawing from the documented best practices and teacher outputs. These materials will be disseminated through localized capacity-building workshops and professional learning communities, encouraging reflection, collaboration, and shared ownership of research-driven instruction.

Additionally, successful teacher practices and contextualized instructional materials will be showcased in school-based learnings to promote peer learning and foster a research culture. The results will also be integrated into the pre-service and in-service teacher education curriculum at Bukidnon State University to strengthen research engagement from the outset of teacher training. A monitoring and evaluation mechanism will be established to assess the long-term impact of these interventions and to guide continuous improvement. Ultimately, the utilization of this study aims to empower multigrade teachers to become agents of educational innovation and reform, contributing meaningfully to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education.

While the study offers meaningful insights into the outcomes of action research training among multigrade teachers, it is not without limitations. The research relied primarily on self-reported data from interviews and document analysis, and only captured short- to medium-term outcomes but did not include a longitudinal follow-up to assess the sustainability of changes in instructional practices and professional development. Future research may consider longitudinal designs to track the lasting effects of action research training over time and may explore the role of digital tools, peer mentoring systems, or institutional policies in scaling and sustaining action research engagement among educators in resource-limited settings.

CONCLUSION

This study affirmed that action research training, when grounded in appreciative and context-responsive approaches, significantly empowers multigrade teachers to become reflective practitioners, innovative educators, and agents of change. through the appreciative inquiry design, participants recognized their strengths, envisioned their ideal professional roles, co-designed supportive structures, and reflected on the tangible outcomes of their engagement. the findings demonstrated substantial improvements across four key impact domains. for capacity-building, the

teachers reported enhanced knowledge, skills, confidence, and self-efficacy in conducting action research. for pedagogical practice, participants adopted more effective and context-sensitive instructional strategies tailored to multigrade settings. for professional development, the training contributed to career advancement and reinforced teachers' identities as change agents. for social and institutional influence, teachers began contributing more actively to school culture and collaborative practices.

The research findings offer practical implications for teacher education institutions to embed action research as core component for professional development. By addressing the existing gap in empirical evidence on the actual outcomes of capacity-building efforts, this study showed that well-structured training initiatives can improve classroom instruction while fostering long-term professional commitment. To sustain this momentum, it is crucial to institutionalize continuous mentoring, integrate supportive policies, and harness technological tools to assist teacher-led research. As education systems strive to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4, capacitating multigrade teachers through transformative research engagement emerges as a critical strategy for achieving equitable, inclusive, and quality education in underserved communities.

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