

Lived Experiences of Teachers in the Implementation of Integrated School System: Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, and Support System

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Abstract

This study examined teachers' lived experiences in implementing the integrated school system at Panisijan Integrated School in Uson, Masbate, with emphasis on implementation challenges, coping mechanisms, support systems, and professional resilience. Guided by the Input–Process–Output conceptual framework, the study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to understand teachers' experiences within the integrated-school setting. Complete enumeration identified 15 eligible teachers, of whom 12 participated in the study. Data were collected using a validated structured interview guide containing open-ended questions administered through Google Forms and were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that implementing the integrated school system was challenging but meaningful, providing opportunities for collaboration and professional growth while presenting significant instructional and organizational demands. Teachers encountered inadequate instructional materials, limited facilities and technological resources, staffing shortages, heavy teaching and administrative workloads, insufficient instructional time, and difficulties addressing diverse learner needs. They managed these challenges through time management, prioritization, collaboration, differentiated and flexible instruction, continuous professional development, mentoring, adaptability, personal commitment, and resilience. Administrative, technical, emotional, and peer support further strengthened their capacity to sustain instructional responsibilities. The study concludes that effective integrated school implementation requires responsive and holistic support addressing teachers' instructional and well-being needs. It recommends improvements in infrastructure, learning and ICT resources, staffing, workload management, professional development, mentoring, teacher welfare, institutional coordination, and evidence-based educational policies. The study supports SDG 4 – Quality Education by contributing to inclusive, equitable, accessible, and quality education in an underserved rural setting. Its sustainability impact centers on educational, institutional, community, and socio-economic sustainability through sustained instructional quality, teacher resilience, institutional responsiveness, and equitable access to education.

Keywords: Coping Mechanisms, Educational Sustainability, Integrated School System, Professional Resilience, Quality Education, Support Systems, Teacher Workload, Teachers' Lived Experiences

1. Introduction

Integrated school systems are an educational reform strategy intended to improve access, continuity, inclusivity, and quality across basic education levels, particularly in geographically isolated and resource-constrained communities. In the Philippine context, integrated schools provide multiple levels of basic education under a unified administrative and instructional structure (Department of Education [DepEd], 2020). This model is especially relevant in Unserved and Underserved Areas (UUAs), where access to complete basic education remains limited. Internationally, inclusive and equitable education is central to Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2015), while inequalities exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the need for accessible and responsive educational systems (Agayon et al., 2022). Although integrated schooling can improve learner progression and maximize available educational resources (Bray, 2019; UNESCO, 2021), its implementation creates substantial demands for teachers. These include multigrade instruction, differentiated teaching, increased administrative responsibilities, limited instructional resources, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient specialized training. The present study examines these realities at Panisijan Integrated School in Uson, Masbate, focusing on teachers' lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, support systems, and professional resilience. By investigating a newly converted integrated school serving rural communities, the study seeks to provide context-specific evidence that may strengthen educational policy, teacher support, and instructional quality.

Integrated schools combine several grade levels within one organizational structure to maximize resources and maintain continuity of learning (Bray, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). This model has been recognized as a means of reducing educational disparities in vulnerable communities. However, its effectiveness depends not only on expanding access but also on ensuring that teachers have sufficient resources, preparation, and institutional support to address the instructional demands created by diverse grade levels. These demands are particularly important in rural Philippine communities where access to secondary education remains constrained. Teacher shortages associated with increasing public-school enrollment can produce high teacher-student ratios that limit individualized instruction and affect teaching effectiveness (Department of Education, 2021). In integrated and multigrade environments, teachers must simultaneously manage different curricula, learner abilities, developmental levels, assessments, and classroom activities. Little (2007) notes that multigrade teaching requires greater cognitive flexibility and instructional adaptability than monograde teaching. These instructional pressures are intensified by insufficient personnel, instructional materials, infrastructure, and specialized preparation. Mulryan-Kyne (2007) emphasizes that inadequate professional preparation creates difficulties in lesson planning, classroom organization, and assessment in multigrade classrooms. Resource constraints in UUAs can also require teachers to improvise materials and independently develop instructional strategies (UNESCO, 2021). Despite these difficulties, teachers use adaptive strategies to sustain instruction. Teacher resilience is influenced by adaptability, professional commitment, and collaborative relationships, according to Gu and Day (2013). Philippine educators similarly use time management, resourcefulness, and collaboration to cope with professional demands, as found by Naparan and Castañeda (2021), while collegial sharing and peer mentoring can reduce work-related pressures and support instructional effectiveness, as identified by Agayon et al. (2022). Panisijan Integrated School provides a localized setting in which these conditions intersect. Established as a primary school in 1935, it was converted into an integrated school on April 30, 2025 and began integrated operations on June 16, 2025, serving Kindergarten to Grade 8. Before and during the transition described in the study, the school had 15 teaching personnel, six buildings, 12 concrete classrooms, and 362 learners. Its location in Barangay Panisijan allows it to serve learners from Buenasuerte, Aurora, Libertad, and Dapdap, including communities without their own Junior High School facilities. Before integration, learners seeking secondary education often had to travel approximately three kilometers to Buenavista National High School, creating financial, geographic, and safety difficulties. Establishing an integrated school reduced these barriers by bringing additional levels of basic education closer to the community. However, the resulting growth in enrollment and instructional responsibilities also intensified demands on the school's limited teaching

workforce. Thus, expanding educational access must be accompanied by adequate institutional support, training, staffing, and resources if instructional quality is to be sustained.

The literature identifies educational access as an important advantage of integrated and multigrade schooling while consistently demonstrating that access alone does not guarantee educational quality. Effective integration requires curricular continuity, coordination among educational levels, teacher preparation, differentiated instruction, appropriate resources, and community support. Multigrade teaching particularly requires teachers to shift continually among different concepts, grade levels, learner needs, and curricular expectations, increasing cognitive demands, preparation time, workload, and stress. International studies provide substantial evidence of these difficulties. In South Africa, teachers in multigrade classrooms simultaneously manage several grade levels, lesson preparations, differentiated instruction, and assessment requirements, contributing to time-management difficulties and mental strain. The findings indicate that inadequate support can compromise instructional delivery and learner performance (Taole, 2020). Differentiated instruction provides one response to learner heterogeneity. Research in Greece demonstrates that differences in learners' abilities, learning styles, pace, and prior knowledge require instructional adaptation rather than uniform teaching. Flexible activities, targeted support, and differentiated assessment can improve instruction in heterogeneous classrooms. (Kordaki, 2015) Similarly, adaptive teaching and flexible pedagogy are essential when teachers simultaneously accommodate different grade levels, developmental stages, and abilities, although their effectiveness remains dependent on available resources and institutional support (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015). Resource inadequacy further complicates integrated and multigrade instruction. In underserved settings, shortages of instructional materials and facilities can force teachers to improvise resources, potentially creating inconsistencies between instructional practices and curriculum expectations (Ames, 2016). Professional isolation presents another challenge because limited opportunities for peer interaction can increase emotional strain and weaken resilience. Collaborative and collegial relationships are therefore important for sustaining teacher well-being and effectiveness. (Brown, 2010) Curricular adaptation is also necessary because standardized instructional materials may not adequately address learners functioning at different grade levels and stages. Teachers consequently modify content, activities, and instructional resources to make learning appropriate to diverse classroom needs. (Pridmore, 2007) At the same time, constant movement between different programs and grade levels increases mental workload, limits planning and reflection, and can contribute to emotional exhaustion. (Khan and Khan, 2011) Resilience enables teachers to continue performing under these demanding conditions. Rather than functioning solely as an individual trait, resilience develops through teachers' interaction with their professional environment. Social support, positive perspectives, instructional adjustment, and problem-solving can help teachers manage limited resources, workload, and emotional pressure. (Brumat 2011) Successful transition to an integrated education model likewise requires structural and curricular alignment because integration changes not only school administration but also instructional delivery, curriculum organization, and continuity across grade levels. (Vithanapathirana 2010) Effective classroom organization is equally important. Teachers managing several grade levels must organize schedules, distribute attention among learner groups, maintain discipline, and coordinate simultaneous activities. Strong time-management and organizational skills therefore support effective multigrade instruction. (Beukes 2006) Resource constraints remain a fundamental reason for multigrade arrangements and contribute to instructional complexity and workload (Aksoy, 2008; Little, 2004). Teachers in rural settings may also carry both instructional and administrative responsibilities, further increasing workload. (Cornish 2010) Overall, international evidence indicates that multigrade and integrated education can increase educational access in isolated communities, but successful implementation requires teacher preparation, adequate learning resources, and effective management. Without these enabling conditions, demands on teachers can adversely affect professional performance and well-being. (UNESCO 2014) Philippine literature presents similar patterns. Integrated schooling is situated within national reforms, including RA 10533 and DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2020. The K to 12 structure expanded basic education and the instructional responsibilities associated with it, while the integration of elementary and secondary levels requires coordination within a unified organizational framework. The Department of Education (2020) provides the policy basis for converting and managing integrated

schools, while Llego (2020) emphasizes that integration requires movement from separate educational arrangements toward a seamless organizational structure. Access can itself create capacity challenges. Consequently, schools serving surrounding communities may simultaneously experience increased enrollment and insufficient capacity. The combined findings of Philippine Institute for Development Studies or PIDS (2020) and Ulla (2018) further indicate that teachers face overlapping instructional, clerical, and administrative tasks while sometimes handling diverse or multigrade classes without adequate specialized preparation. Such demands reduce teaching time and contribute to stress, highlighting the importance of collaboration, self-directed learning, and time management. Social relationships constitute an important coping resource among Filipino teachers. Agayon (2022) describes peer interaction and collegial sharing as responses to classroom challenges, workload, and administrative demands. Similarly, Naparan and Castañeda (2021) points out that coaching, mentoring, teamwork, and collegial relationships help teachers manage emotional and instructional challenges. These findings suggest that resilience in demanding school environments operates through both individual adaptation and collective support. The importance of balancing access with educational quality is reinforced by Briones (2021), who stressed that educational policy must address quality learning outcomes as well as access. Integrated-school implementation must therefore consider workload, infrastructure, multigrade instruction, and administrative responsibilities because unresolved systemic constraints may undermine instructional effectiveness.

Globally, integrated and multigrade schools are particularly relevant to geographically isolated and underserved communities because they can expand access and support continuity of education. Research across South Africa, Greece, Finland, Peru, Sri Lanka, Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, Turkey, and Namibia shows common concerns involving workload, learner diversity, curriculum adaptation, resource constraints, teacher stress, professional isolation, and institutional support. Collectively, these studies indicate that integrated schooling is most effective when structural access is accompanied by adequate instructional capacity. Foreign evidence demonstrates that teachers' experiences are strongly shaped by these conditions. Studies associate multigrade instruction with workload and assessment pressures (Taole, 2020), differentiated instruction with the accommodation of learner diversity (Kordaki, 2015), adaptive pedagogy with effective multigrade teaching (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015), and inadequate materials with instructional constraints in underserved communities (Ames, 2016). Teacher effectiveness is also connected to professional collaboration and resilience (Brown, 2010; Brumat, 2011; Khan & Khan, 2011). More broadly, integrated schooling can improve continuity and access when curriculum, teacher preparation, and organizational structures are appropriately aligned (UNESCO, 2014; Vithanapathirana, 2010). Within the Philippines, national policy provides the institutional foundation for integrated schooling (Department of Education [DepEd], 2020; Llego, 2020). Nevertheless, geographically disadvantaged public schools frequently experience inadequate infrastructure, facilities, instructional materials, and teaching personnel (Reyes, 2022). Administrative and clerical responsibilities add further pressures to teachers' instructional work (Dofiles, 2019; Philippine Institute for Development Studies [PIDS], 2020). Philippine empirical studies reinforce these concerns. Dofiles (2019) provided localized evidence from Masbate showing that administrative and clerical duties can reduce time for instructional preparation. Teachers nevertheless demonstrate adaptive responses. Resilience and emotional endurance help educators manage difficult teaching conditions. (Villaluz 2020) Institutional effectiveness also depends on leadership, coordination, resource allocation, and support systems. (Capuyan et al. 2021) Where instructional resources are insufficient, teachers may improvise teaching materials. (Maming 2017) Peer mentoring can reduce occupational stress and strengthen instructional confidence. (Segovia 2020) Infrastructure deficiencies may directly affect instructional quality and contribute to teachers' difficulties. (Reyes, 2022) Localized and culturally responsive instructional materials further support adaptation to learner needs. (Bernardo 2019) Increasing student populations and class sizes also add instructional pressure. (J.Dingle 2021) Teacher preparedness is particularly significant where educators handle multiple classroom arrangements without specialized training. (Ulla, 2018) Philippine evidence further identifies professional development, collegial sharing, time management, teamwork, and resource sharing as important dimensions of resilience and coping. ((Agayon et al. 2022; Naparan and Castañeda 2021) Resource limitations, limited support, and administrative demands remain persistent national

concerns. (Salamat, 2020; PIDS, 2020) These conditions converge in Panisijan Integrated School in Barangay Panisijan, Uson, Masbate. The barangay is a rural community of seven puroks with an approximate land area of 436.4250 hectares and a population of 2,262 according to the 2020 Census. Agricultural, poultry, livestock, business, government, and private-sector activities support local livelihoods. The school serves as an educational hub for Panisijan and nearby barangays, including Buenasuerte, Aurora, Libertad, and Dapdap. Although this location improves access, it also brings a growing and diverse learner population into a school operating with limited human and physical resources. The school is approximately seven kilometers from the District Office of Uson North in Poblacion, Uson, Masbate, and approximately 30 kilometers from the Division Office in Masbate City. Its physical site contains existing classrooms and school facilities together with areas designated for additional facilities, reflecting the institutional environment within which teachers perform their responsibilities. Rather than treating geographical accessibility as sufficient evidence of successful integration, the context demonstrates the importance of examining whether staffing, infrastructure, instructional resources, and teacher support can keep pace with increased educational access.

The study conceptualizes teachers in integrated schools as operating within a complex educational environment in which structural and instructional conditions shape their lived experiences. Multigrade teaching, workload, learner diversity, limited resources, administrative responsibilities, and available support systems influence the challenges teachers experience and the coping mechanisms through which they sustain instructional delivery. Several key concepts define this inquiry. Challenges encompass difficulties and systemic constraints associated with workload, instructional responsibilities, resources, and multigrade teaching (Bray, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Coping mechanisms refer to behavioral, cognitive, and professional strategies used to manage these demands. The integrated-school context refers specifically to Panisijan Integrated School operating under a unified administrative and instructional framework (Department of Education [DepEd], 2020). Lived experiences encompass teachers' firsthand perceptions and everyday realities as they navigate integrated-school implementation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Teacher performance concerns perceived effectiveness in instruction, classroom management, and administrative responsibilities (DepEd, 2020), while teacher resilience involves adapting to professional difficulties and sustaining effectiveness under resource constraints (Gu & Day, 2013). UUAs represent geographically disadvantaged communities with limited access to complete basic education (DepEd, 2021). The conceptual framework is organized through the Input–Process–Output (IPO) model, which structures relationships among research inputs, analytical processes, and expected outcomes (McGaw & Watson, 2006). Its use in educational and social-science research supports clarity and systematic analysis. Within this study, the input consists of teachers' lived experiences, including their challenges, coping mechanisms, and available support systems at Panisijan Integrated School. The process involves structured interviews, transcription, coding of significant statements, and thematic analysis. The output consists of themes concerning teachers' challenges, coping mechanisms, and support systems, together with context-specific insights and recommendations for strengthening integrated-school implementation and instructional quality. Thus, the conceptual paradigm treats teachers' experiences as the central evidence to be systematically analyzed and translated into findings relevant to educational practice and support.

The reviewed literature establishes broad agreement that integrated and multigrade schools can expand educational access while creating complex demands for teachers. International evidence identifies instructional complexity, workload, curriculum adaptation, stress, inadequate resources, and limited institutional support as recurring concerns (Taole, 2020; Kordaki, 2015; Hyry-Belhammer & Hascher, 2015; Ames, 2016). At the same time, adaptive pedagogy, resilience, and professional collaboration can help sustain teaching under demanding conditions (Brown, 2010; Brumat, 2011; Khan & Khan, 2011). Philippine evidence similarly demonstrates that integrated-school reforms expand teachers' responsibilities across diverse learners, administrative duties, and multigrade settings (Department of Education [DepEd], 2020; Llego, 2020). These responsibilities are intensified by shortages in classrooms, facilities, instructional resources, and personnel (Reyes, 2022), while administrative tasks contribute additional workload and stress (Dofiles, 2019; Philippine Institute for Development Studies [PIDS], 2020). Filipino teachers respond through peer collaboration, mentoring,

time management, improvisation, and emotional resilience (Agayon et al., 2022; Naparan & Castañeda, 2021; Villaluz, 2020; Maming, 2017). Foreign and Philippine research therefore converges on resource limitations, instructional complexity, administrative workload, and insufficient specialized preparation as factors affecting teacher performance and well-being (Little, 2004; Aksoy, 2008; Ulla, 2018). The literature also identifies differentiated instruction, resilience, collegial support, and adaptive coping as important responses (Kordaki, 2015; Brumat, 2011; Segovia, 2020). However, existing research has largely examined general multigrade practices, workload, resilience, or instructional challenges. Less attention has been devoted to how teachers personally interpret and respond to the simultaneous demands of integrated-school implementation within a newly converted, resource-constrained Philippine school. There is particularly limited localized evidence examining lived experiences, structural constraints, coping mechanisms, and support systems together within a single phenomenological inquiry. Panisijan Integrated School provides a significant context for addressing this gap because it is newly converted, serves several surrounding barangays, and operates with limited teaching personnel while accommodating multiple grade levels and diverse learner needs. The study therefore uses a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine how teachers experience integrated-school implementation, the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ to cope, and the support systems influencing their professional resilience. The inquiry is limited to teachers' perspectives and does not seek to quantitatively evaluate institutional effectiveness, measure student academic performance, or generalize findings beyond the research setting. Of the 15 teaching personnel identified in the study context, 12 participated in the interviews. The resulting evidence is intended to provide a contextualized understanding that may support school leadership, teacher-support mechanisms, and policies for similar integrated and underserved educational environments.

The study is directly aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Quality Education, particularly its emphasis on inclusive, equitable, and accessible education and lifelong learning. The international framework positions inclusion as fundamental to achieving quality education for learners regardless of geographic, socioeconomic, or individual circumstances. The source chapter specifically anchors the study in SDG 4 and its objective to “ensure the inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Integrated schooling contributes to this objective by bringing educational opportunities closer to learners in communities where complete basic education is otherwise difficult to access. This is particularly relevant to Panisijan Integrated School because its conversion expands educational provision for learners from Panisijan and neighboring barangays. However, SDG 4 requires more than physical access. Educational inclusion must also be accompanied by effective teaching, adequate resources, capable and supported teachers, and learning environments that can respond to diverse learner needs. The experiences of teachers are therefore central to understanding whether expanded access can be sustained without compromising instructional quality. The study contributes to SDG 4 by examining the challenges that may hinder effective teaching and the coping mechanisms and support systems that help teachers sustain educational delivery. The chapter does not provide a sufficiently developed empirical basis for claiming direct alignment with additional SDGs. Accordingly, SDG 4 is retained as the principal and explicitly supported SDG, rather than extending the study's alignment beyond what its educational focus and source material substantiate.

The study contributes primarily to educational sustainability by examining whether expanded access through integrated schooling can be accompanied by sustainable instructional quality. Integrated schools may improve continuity and inclusion, but their long-term effectiveness depends on teachers' ability to manage workload, learner diversity, multigrade instruction, administrative responsibilities, and resource limitations. Understanding teachers' lived experiences can therefore help identify conditions necessary to sustain educational reform rather than treating school conversion itself as the final measure of success. The study also has implications for institutional sustainability. Teachers' accounts can provide school administrators with evidence concerning workload distribution, mentoring, professional support, resource allocation, and working conditions. Strengthening these areas can support teacher well-being, resilience, and instructional effectiveness. For DepEd policymakers, context-specific findings may contribute to reviewing staffing patterns, teacher training, and support mechanisms in integrated schools, particularly in unserved and underserved

communities. At the community and socio-economic sustainability level, accessible integrated schooling can reduce educational barriers for rural families whose children would otherwise travel farther to continue basic education. Because Panisijan Integrated School serves several neighboring barangays, sustaining its educational capacity is connected to the community's ability to maintain accessible learning opportunities over time. Stronger school-community understanding may also encourage collaboration and local support for educational resources and infrastructure. Teacher resilience represents another important component of sustainability. Collegial sharing, peer mentoring, collaborative problem-solving, resourcefulness, and time management can help teachers maintain instruction under difficult circumstances. However, sustainable education should not depend solely on individual teachers continually compensating for structural deficiencies. Institutional and policy support remain necessary to ensure that resilience is reinforced by adequate working conditions and resources. Accordingly, the study's multidisciplinary sustainability contribution lies principally at the intersection of educational, institutional, community, and socio-economic sustainability. By examining how teachers experience and respond to the implementation of an integrated school in a rural underserved setting, the inquiry can provide evidence for improving teacher support, strengthening institutional responsiveness, sustaining instructional quality, and maintaining equitable educational access. These outcomes support the broader objective of ensuring that educational expansion remains both accessible and sustainable for the communities it is intended to serve.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teachers in implementing the integrated school system, particularly the challenges they encountered and the coping mechanisms they used to maintain resilience during instructional delivery. Phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to experiences within a particular context through detailed personal narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to capture teachers' perspectives, emotions, and everyday realities within their teaching environment and understand how these experiences influenced their professional practices and well-being (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher also practiced bracketing by consciously setting aside personal biases and preconceptions so that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts. Rather than quantitatively measuring variables, the study identified meanings, patterns, and themes that represented the essence of teachers' experiences in the integrated school setting.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Panisijan Integrated School in the Uson North District, Province of Masbate. The school provided the setting for examining the experiences of teachers directly involved in implementing the integrated school system.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The identified participants were the 15 teachers of Panisijan Integrated School who were directly involved in implementing the integrated school system. They handled different grade levels and subject areas across elementary and secondary education, providing varied perspectives on the challenges, coping mechanisms, and support systems associated with integrated schooling. However, only 12 of the 15 identified teacher-participants completed the interview because of personal commitments. Consequently, the findings were based on the lived experiences and responses of these 12 participating teachers. To protect their identities, the participants were assigned neutral codes beginning with P1 for Participant 1, P2 for Participant 2, P3 for Participant 3, and succeeding codes for the remaining participants. These codes were used in presenting and analyzing interview responses to maintain anonymity and allow participants to express their experiences, opinions, and emotions without disclosing their identities. This procedure supported confidentiality and the protection of participants' personal information (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used complete enumeration sampling to identify teachers currently assigned to Panisijan Integrated School. Complete enumeration includes all members of an identified population who satisfy the study criteria and is appropriate when the target population is small, accessible, and directly relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is widely classified as a type of purposive, non-probability sampling technique used when a population shares highly specific, uncommon traits, or when overall population size is small enough to make universal data collection fully feasible (Lærd Dissertation, 2016). All 15 qualified teachers were therefore identified for inclusion. Complete enumeration, also referred to as total population sampling, is appropriate when all eligible members of a relatively small and accessible population are included (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Although all 15 teachers constituted the intended participant population, only 12 participated in the interviews. This approach sought to capture diverse viewpoints and provide a holistic understanding of teachers' experiences within the integrated school context.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a structured interview guide containing open-ended questions intended to generate detailed accounts of participants' experiences. The use of open-ended questions is consistent with qualitative data collection approaches designed to obtain rich and in-depth narratives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview guide addressed four areas corresponding to the research questions: teachers' lived experiences in implementing the integrated school system; challenges involving workload, instructional delivery, facilities, resources, and related concerns; coping mechanisms for managing stress, workload, and professional responsibilities; and support received from administrators, colleagues, and the community that influenced teacher resilience, motivation, well-being, and effectiveness. Although structured, the instrument allowed follow-up and probing questions to clarify responses and examine emerging themes while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), and Creswell (2018), emphasize that flexibility and iterative questioning to obtain detailed and meaningful data is consistent with qualitative interviewing techniques. The interview guide also underwent expert content validation for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives, and necessary revisions were incorporated based on the experts' feedback.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Before collecting data, the researcher secured formal permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of Masbate Province through an online request recommended by the Senior Education Program Specialist for Planning and Research and duly signed and noted by the researcher's Thesis Adviser. The researcher subsequently coordinated with the school head of Panisijan Integrated School and the intended participants. After approval, the participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations. Data were gathered through structured interviews administered via Google Forms because data collection occurred during the teachers' vacation period. Participants were provided sufficient time to submit their responses through the link, and informed consent was obtained before participation. Participants were allowed to express their experiences using the language with which they were most comfortable. With permission, interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy, after which the responses were transcribed verbatim. The researcher reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and completeness before coding and thematic analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify, organize, and interpret recurring patterns and themes reflecting teachers' lived experiences. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative method for identifying meaningful patterns in participants' responses. The analysis followed six (6) key phases including Familiarization with the Data, Generating Initial Codes, Searching for Themes, Reviewing Themes, Defining and Naming Themes, and Producing the Report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following data collection, the recorded responses were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly reviewed to familiarize the researchers with participants' narratives. Significant words, phrases, and ideas relevant to the research questions were

identified and coded. Related responses and codes were then grouped into categories, themes, and sub-themes representing teachers' lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and support systems. The resulting themes were interpreted to describe the essence of participants' experiences. To strengthen credibility and trustworthiness, the themes were repeatedly reviewed and compared with the participants' actual responses to ensure that interpretations accurately represented their perspectives.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, objectives, and procedures before giving consent and were advised that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty or negative consequences. Participant codes rather than actual names were used in transcripts, reports, and research documents to preserve anonymity. Information obtained during the study was treated confidentially, used solely for academic and research purposes, and securely handled to prevent unauthorized access, disclosure, or misuse. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), protecting participants from harm and maintaining confidentiality are essential ethical responsibilities in qualitative research. The researcher also sought to present participants' experiences honestly, accurately, and respectfully while remaining sensitive to their emotions, opinions, and personal experiences. The study complied with the provisions of Republic Act No. 10173 regarding the confidentiality, privacy, and protection of participants' personal information and observed the Department of Education Data Privacy Policy. Collected information was securely handled and restricted to academic and research purposes, thereby promoting trust, respect, and integrity throughout the research process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Teachers' Lived Experiences in the Implementation of the Integrated School System

3.1.1 Challenges and Adjustments in Integrated School Implementation

Teachers described the implementation of the integrated school system as challenging but transformative. Their experiences were characterized by inadequate instructional materials, limited facilities, shortages of teaching and non-teaching personnel, heavier workloads, schedule adjustments, and additional responsibilities. These constraints affected instructional delivery, classroom management, lesson preparation, and daily school operations. Despite these difficulties, teachers also reported positive experiences arising from interaction with colleagues across educational levels. Collaboration enabled them to exchange teaching ideas, align instructional strategies, share responsibilities, and address learners' needs more collectively. The findings indicate that implementing an integrated school requires teachers to adapt simultaneously to resource constraints, staffing shortages, changing responsibilities, and new professional relationships. The difficulties associated with limited resources and diverse instructional responsibilities are consistent with Bray (2019), who explains that integrated and multigrade environments require teachers to adapt to resource limitations, varied instructional demands, and collaborative teaching practices. At the same time, the collaborative experiences reported by teachers suggest that integration can facilitate professional learning, teamwork, and resilience despite operational constraints.

3.1.2 Teachers' Understanding of Quality Education

Teachers perceived quality education as extending beyond academic achievement to include learners' holistic, emotional, social, and personal development. Their experiences emphasized inclusive and learner-centered instruction, emotional stability, continuity of learning, and strong foundational skills. Teachers particularly recognized the importance of literacy and numeracy during the early years, consistency across grade levels, aligned instruction, and engaging learning environments. These findings indicate that teachers understand quality education as an interconnected process involving academic learning and broader learner development. This perspective corresponds with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2017), which emphasizes cognitive, emotional, social, and personal development within inclusive and supportive educational

environments. The teachers' emphasis on continuity and foundational learning further demonstrates how the integrated-school environment can encourage a more comprehensive understanding of learners' educational development across grade levels.

3.2 Challenges Encountered in Implementing the Integrated School System

3.2.1 Instructional and Resource-Related Challenges

Teachers identified inadequate instructional materials, limited technological resources, insufficient classrooms and facilities, and difficulties addressing learner diversity as major instructional challenges. Limited access to learning materials, technology, and appropriate facilities constrained teachers' ability to provide engaging instruction. Teachers also experienced difficulty addressing differences in learners' academic levels, learning styles, emotional needs, and behavioral characteristics within the same classroom environment. The findings demonstrate that resource limitations and learner diversity create interconnected instructional difficulties. Teachers must provide differentiated and inclusive learning while simultaneously working with inadequate materials, facilities, technology, and time. Such conditions are consistent with evidence that integrated and multigrade settings commonly experience resource and facility limitations that affect teaching and learning (Bray, 2019). The combination of resource scarcity and diverse learner needs consequently requires substantial instructional flexibility and adaptation.

3.2.2 Workload and Time Constraints in Instructional Practice

Teachers reported heavy workloads, multiple subject preparations, paperwork, additional school responsibilities, and insufficient instructional time. Some managed four daily teaching preparations in addition to auxiliary duties, activities, reports, and other administrative requirements. These responsibilities increased stress and fatigue, reduced teachers' ability to concentrate on individual subject areas, and required additional time for lesson planning, differentiated activities, and classroom management. Limited class time and unexpected classroom situations also made curriculum coverage difficult and, in some instances, compromised instructional delivery and student learning. These results indicate that instructional quality is affected not only by teachers' classroom responsibilities but also by competing administrative and organizational demands. According to Department of Education (2021), teacher workload and administrative responsibilities remain common concerns affecting teacher performance and well-being in Philippine public schools.

3.2.3 Adaptability and Collaboration in Professional Growth

Despite implementation difficulties, teachers demonstrated flexibility, creativity, patience, collaboration, and problem-solving. They adapted teaching approaches and classroom-management practices to learners' needs and changing school conditions. Teachers also helped one another accomplish responsibilities, exchanged ideas, and viewed challenging experiences as opportunities to strengthen adaptability and professional competence. The findings show that adaptability and collaboration function as professional resources that enable teachers to respond to integrated-school demands. Collegial relationships provide practical solutions, shared knowledge, and emotional support while strengthening teachers' resilience and instructional practice. According to Fullan (2012), collaboration and professional learning communities play a significant role in strengthening teachers' resilience, professional growth, and instructional effectiveness.

3.3 Coping Mechanisms of Teachers

3.3.1 Time Management and Prioritization

Teachers commonly managed competing instructional and administrative responsibilities through time management and prioritization. They organized responsibilities according to urgency, completed important reports first, established priorities, practiced continuous learning, communicated proactively, and attempted to establish boundaries. These strategies enabled them to sequence multiple responsibilities and manage workload more systematically. The findings demonstrate that deliberate task organization is an important individual coping strategy when teachers face simultaneous professional demands. This aligns with research emphasizing that time management is a critical factor in reducing role overload and improving work performance in professional settings (Claessens, van

Eerde, Rutte, & Roe, 2007; Macan, 1994). In education, such strategies are particularly important due to competing instructional and administrative demands (Day & Gu, 2010).

3.3.2 Collaborative Professional Support

Teachers relied substantially on collegial collaboration, peer assistance, resource sharing, and mentoring. Working with colleagues reduced individual workload, facilitated the exchange of teaching strategies and resources, and made professional responsibilities more manageable. Experienced teachers and Master Teachers also provided guidance, encouragement, technical knowledge, and emotional support that strengthened participants' confidence and professional growth. Collaboration therefore functioned as both a workload-management strategy and a professional-learning mechanism. This aligns with Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), who emphasize that strong professional learning communities enhance teacher effectiveness through shared responsibility, collective learning, and continuous collaboration. Mentoring similarly strengthened instructional competence and confidence, consistent with Ingersoll and Strong (2011), who found that mentoring significantly improves teacher effectiveness, confidence, and retention by providing structured professional guidance.

3.3.3 Commitment, Sacrifice, and Resilience

Teachers sustained their professional responsibilities through commitment, personal sacrifice, positive thinking, adaptability, and resilience. Some extended their working time at the expense of rest and family time, while others relied on preparation, flexibility, collaboration, and a positive mindset to remain productive. Their responses demonstrated persistent efforts to fulfill professional obligations despite demanding conditions. These findings show that resilience combines emotional strength, professional commitment, adaptability, and sustained purpose. This aligns with Day and Gu (2010), who explain that teacher resilience is built through sustained commitment and the capacity to maintain professional purpose under pressure, and Gu and Day (2013), who emphasize that resilient teachers remain engaged through adaptive coping, strong motivation, and a deep sense of responsibility to learners.

3.3.4 Differentiated and Flexible Teaching Strategies

Teachers addressed classroom diversity through differentiated instruction, learner-centered strategies, and flexible teaching approaches. These strategies enabled them to modify instruction according to learners' varying needs and abilities and represented an adaptive response to diversity within integrated classrooms. The findings indicate that instructional flexibility is an important classroom-level coping mechanism because teachers must accommodate diverse learners while maintaining equitable learning opportunities. This aligns with the inclusive education framework of UNESCO (2017), which stresses that effective teaching requires flexibility to ensure that all learners, regardless of ability, are supported equitably.

3.3.5 Professional Development, Continuous Learning, and Mentorship

Teachers also used training, workshops, continuous professional development, self-directed learning, and mentorship to strengthen their capacity to respond to changing educational demands. Advice from Master Teachers and experienced colleagues enabled participants to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and improve their instructional practices. These findings demonstrate that resilience depends partly on opportunities for continued professional learning and guided development. This supports the perspective of Michael Fullan (2016), who argued that sustained professional learning is crucial for improving teacher capacity and ensuring successful implementation of educational reforms. Mentorship also aligns with Bandura (1997), who emphasized that observational learning and guided experience enhance professional development and self-confidence.

3.4 Support Systems Influencing Teachers' Professional Resilience

3.4.1 Administrative Support

Teachers identified administrative support as an important source of guidance, direction, monitoring, and organizational structure. School leaders supported teachers through policies, supervision, technical assistance, and guidance that helped them perform their responsibilities and align

instructional practices with institutional expectations. The findings indicate that effective leadership contributes to resilience by providing teachers with organizational clarity and professional support. This supports Leithwood et al. (2004), who found that strong school leadership significantly enhances teacher motivation, instructional quality, and organizational effectiveness by providing clear direction and professional support.

3.4.2 Technical and Instructional Support

Teachers emphasized the importance of functional digital tools, learning resources, ICT facilities, digital platforms, and technical training. Access to these resources helped reduce instructional disruptions and supported more efficient teaching practices. Technical support therefore complements teachers' instructional capacity by ensuring access to the tools required for contemporary teaching. This is supported by UNESCO (2021), which emphasizes that adequate digital infrastructure and teacher ICT support are critical for improving instructional quality and ensuring effective teaching in modern education systems.

3.4.3 Emotional, Peer, Coaching, and Mentoring Support

Teachers reported that emotional support, teamwork, trust, coaching, mentoring, and collegial relationships helped them manage stress and sustain motivation. Mentoring from colleagues and experts also provided opportunities for reflection, skill development, and professional growth. The findings emphasize the social dimension of professional resilience. This is consistent with Lev Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized that social interaction is essential for learning and development. Likewise, Bandura (1997) explained that social support enhances self-efficacy, enabling individuals to better cope with challenges and sustain performance in demanding environments.

3.4.4 Motivation and Personal Growth

Teachers also described professional support and their teaching experiences as sources of motivation, inspiration, personal improvement, and fulfillment. These experiences helped sustain engagement despite the demands associated with integrated schooling. This finding indicates that professional resilience includes an internal dimension grounded in meaning, purpose, and personal growth. This aligns with Martin Seligman (2011), who explained that meaning and purpose are key components of human well-being and motivation, especially in high-demand professions like teaching.

3.5 Teachers' Recommendations for Improving Integrated School Implementation

3.5.1 Infrastructure, Facilities, Learning Resources, and Technical Support

Teachers recommended improving classrooms, comfort rooms, water supply, school facilities, instructional materials, internet connectivity, technology, and technical assistance. Their responses indicate that inadequate physical and instructional resources constrain classroom management and teaching efficiency and that both physical infrastructure and educational resources require improvement. These recommendations reinforce the importance of appropriate learning environments and resources. This aligns with Earthman (2004), who found that the quality of school facilities significantly influences teaching effectiveness, student behavior, and learning outcomes. OECD (2019) similarly emphasizes adequate learning resources and digital infrastructure as important drivers of instructional quality, while UNESCO (2021) underscores equitable access to educational infrastructure and ICT support for sustaining inclusive and quality education.

3.5.2 Teacher Workforce and Workload Management

Teachers recommended hiring sufficient personnel, reducing class sizes, and minimizing administrative paperwork. These recommendations reflect concerns that inadequate staffing and excessive non-instructional responsibilities contribute to teacher overload and reduce the time available for instruction. The recommendations indicate that strengthening the teacher workforce must occur alongside efforts to manage professional demands. This supports the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model proposed by Arnold Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti (2007), which explains that reducing job demands while increasing resources is essential for improving employee well-being and performance.

3.5.3 Professional Development and Institutional Support

Teachers recommended continuous training, seminars, professional development, peer mentoring, stronger staff coordination, and improved institutional planning. These measures were viewed as necessary for adapting instructional practices to educational reforms and strengthening organizational support. The recommendations demonstrate that effective implementation requires both individual capacity-building and coordinated institutional leadership. This reflects the perspective of Michael Fullan (2016), who argued that sustained professional learning is essential for meaningful educational change and for equipping teachers with the skills needed to respond to evolving classroom demands. It also aligns with Andy Hargreaves (2005), who stressed that effective school improvement depends on collaborative leadership and well-coordinated institutional systems that support teachers in their instructional roles.

3.5.4 Curriculum and Instructional Support

Teachers recommended learner-support programs, including remediation and inclusive and differentiated teaching strategies. These recommendations reflect the need for instructional systems that respond more effectively to differences in learners' needs and abilities. The findings suggest that strengthening integrated schooling requires instructional approaches capable of addressing learner diversity rather than relying on uniform teaching practices. This aligns with the inclusive education principles of UNESCO (2017), which advocate for equitable learning opportunities through responsive and differentiated instructional approaches.

3.5.5 Teacher Welfare and Well-Being

Teachers identified salary improvement, mental health, wellness, and support for psychological well-being as important areas for improvement. These concerns demonstrate that effective implementation depends not only on instructional resources but also on conditions that support teachers personally and professionally. The findings indicate that teacher welfare is closely connected to the sustainability of professional performance under demanding conditions. This reflects the findings of Chris Kyriacou (2001), who highlighted that teacher stress and burnout are strongly influenced by working conditions, compensation, and emotional well-being support systems.

3.5.6 Collaboration and Peer Learning

Teachers recommended strengthening professional relationships through activities such as team building and peer-collaboration sessions. These recommendations indicate that teachers value structured opportunities to exchange knowledge, develop stronger professional relationships, and learn collaboratively. Collaboration can therefore support both professional learning and teachers' capacity to manage integrated-school demands collectively. These findings support Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized that social interaction and collaborative learning enhance professional development and knowledge sharing.

3.5.7 Policy Improvement and System Reform

Teachers recommended stronger monitoring and evaluation of educational programs and reconsideration of programs that have not demonstrated effectiveness. Their responses indicate a preference for evidence-based implementation and continuous assessment of whether policies and programs produce their intended outcomes. These recommendations suggest that sustainable integrated-school implementation requires policies that respond to evidence and feedback from actual school conditions. This aligns with Michael Fullan (2016), who emphasized that sustainable educational reform must be grounded in continuous evaluation, feedback, and evidence-based decision-making. Taken together, the recommendations indicate that strengthening integrated schooling requires coordinated improvements in infrastructure, staffing, workload, professional development, institutional support, curriculum, teacher welfare, collaboration, and policy implementation.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that implementing the integrated school system at Panisijan Integrated School is both challenging and meaningful, as it improves educational access and creates opportunities for teacher collaboration and professional growth while exposing limitations in staffing, infrastructure, instructional resources, and workload management. Teachers face difficulties arising from inadequate facilities and learning resources, multiple teaching and administrative responsibilities, curriculum demands, limited instructional time, and diverse learner needs, all of which affect instructional efficiency and teaching effectiveness. Nevertheless, they demonstrate resilience and adaptability through time management, prioritization, collaboration, differentiated and learner-centered instruction, continuous professional learning, mentoring, and personal commitment. Their capacity to sustain effective instruction is further strengthened by administrative, technical, emotional, and peer support. Overall, effective implementation of the integrated school system requires responsive and holistic support that addresses teachers' instructional and well-being needs while sustaining quality and inclusive education.

Educational authorities, school administrators, and policymakers should strengthen the implementation of the integrated school system by improving school facilities, classrooms, water systems, instructional materials, ICT resources, internet connectivity, staffing, and workload management. Additional teaching personnel and reduced administrative demands should be considered to improve instructional efficiency, while continuous training, professional development, mentoring, collaboration, and peer learning should be sustained to strengthen teachers' adaptability and resilience. Administrative, technical, emotional, and peer support systems should likewise be enhanced, together with learner-support programs, teacher welfare and mental health initiatives, stronger institutional coordination, and evidence-based educational policies. These measures should collectively address teachers' professional and instructional needs and support effective, inclusive, and sustainable integrated-school implementation.

The study was limited by participant availability, as only 12 of the 15 identified teacher-participants from Panisijan Integrated School participated, while three were unable to complete the interview because of personal commitments. Data collection was also conducted through Google Forms during the teachers' vacation period. Consequently, the findings were derived from the experiences and responses of the participating teachers within the specific context of Panisijan Integrated School.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The study adhered to ethical standards by ensuring informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, respect for participants, and protection of personal information throughout the research process. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations and were allowed to withdraw at any time without penalty or negative consequences. Participant codes were used to protect identities, and collected information was securely handled and restricted to academic and research purposes. Formal permission for data collection was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent of Masbate Province, followed by coordination with the school head and participants. The study also complied with Republic Act No. 10173 and observed the Department of Education Data Privacy Policy to safeguard participants' privacy and personal information.

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