



Teachers' Pedagogical Adaptations and Professional Demands Across Elementary and College Classrooms in the Philippines

Abbygael R. Gemina*, Kristhille C. Talaroc, Maymay B. Landawon, Aldrin Malinao

Saint Columban College, Pagadian City, Mindanao, Philippines

*Corresponding author's email: abbygemina16@gmail.com

Abstract

Teachers who work across elementary and college settings must adapt their instruction to different expectations for guidance and learner independence. Yet how they navigate these pedagogical differences alongside professional demands remains insufficiently understood. This study aims to examine pedagogical adaptations, challenges, and sources of professional support among teachers with cross-level teaching experience in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines. The study employed a qualitative case study design involving four licensed teachers, two Grade 6 pupils, and two college students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and field notes, and were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that teachers reported using simplified explanations, repetition, interactive activities, and close guidance in elementary classrooms, whereas college instruction emphasized independent assignments and reflective discussion. Reported challenges included learner readiness, classroom management, engagement, lesson preparation, and time allocation. Teachers identified classroom routines, contextualized examples, reflection, time management, and peer collaboration as strategies for managing these demands, while workshops and webinars were recognized as professional learning resources. These findings contribute context-specific insights into how pedagogical adaptations intersect with professional demands, with implications for responsive elementary lesson planning, teacher professional development, and collegial support.

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1. Introduction

Instructional responsiveness is especially consequential in elementary education, where pupils are developing foundational knowledge alongside the capacity to participate, regulate their learning, and collaborate. Evidence synthesized by de Ruig et al. (2023) links supportive teacher–pupil interactions with selected components of self-regulated learning, while elementary intervention research indicates that explicit strategy guidance can support children's self-regulation in specific subjects (Lee et al., 2023). Reviews of primary-school programs also identify the potential of structured self-regulated learning instruction, although findings depend on program characteristics and



measured outcomes (Olid-Luque et al., 2025). Alongside these approaches, playful and interactive classroom activity remains an important pedagogical possibility (Parker et al., 2022). The educational problem is therefore not whether young learners should receive guidance, but how teachers judge and adjust the guidance required for meaningful participation and learning.

That judgment becomes more complex when educators have responsibilities at substantially different educational levels. Elementary pupils may need explicit explanations, predictable classroom routines, and support for participation, whereas college courses often place greater emphasis on independent academic tasks and discussion. These are differences in instructional expectations, not fixed developmental characteristics of every learner. Research on perceived support across educational stages suggests that autonomy and self-regulation are socially supported rather than simply acquired with age (Martínez-López et al., 2023). Observational work with young learners also associates teachers' autonomy-supportive practices with self-regulation, demonstrating that independence and instructional support need not be treated as opposites (Zachariou & Bonneville-Roussy, 2024). Thus, teaching across elementary and college settings raises a distinctive question about how the same educators decide when to direct learning and when to transfer responsibility to students.

Constructivist perspectives offer a conceptual language for this question. Piaget (1972) emphasized the changing organization of reasoning and knowledge construction, but his account should not be used to classify all pupils or college students by educational level alone. More directly, scholarship on scaffolding treats instructional assistance as contingent on a learning task and the learner's emerging understanding (Dominguez & Svihla, 2023). Recent reviews of differentiated instruction similarly describe adjustment across content, learning processes, and classroom conditions rather than the selection of a single method (Ardenlid et al., 2025; Dell'Anna et al., 2026). Studies of inclusive elementary classrooms show that differentiated explanations and structured participation can be combined with opportunities for active learning (Lin et al., 2026). Together, these perspectives support an examination of instructional guidance as a flexible decision rather than a uniform feature of an age group.

Empirical research has identified teacher- and context-related conditions associated with such decisions. In a large study of Chinese secondary teachers, Bi et al. (2023) connected reported differentiation practices with instructional beliefs and classroom conditions. Studies in elementary settings show that teachers use information from pupils and lesson planning to make instructional adjustments, while also differing in the strategies they select (Kahmann et al., 2024; Kalinowski et al., 2024). Pozas et al. (2022) likewise examined the relevance of teacher interest for differentiated instruction, and Grecu (2023)

described how curricular resources may both support and complicate planning for diverse learners. These studies establish the importance of teacher judgment but predominantly investigate variation at the school level or within a teaching assignment. They do not, by themselves, explain how one educator negotiates the contrast between elementary and college teaching.

Instructional differentiation also has organizational costs. A mixed-methods study by Pozas et al. (2023) found that differentiated instruction could be experienced as professionally rewarding yet somewhat stressful; recent evidence from Turkish classrooms identifies time constraints, resource limitations, and administrative conditions among reported barriers (Daşcıoğlu & Bümen, 2025). Research on teachers' workload further cautions against assuming a straightforward relationship between time allocation and pedagogical practice (Wang, 2025). Professional capital, school conditions, and leadership may provide resources for instructional change, although the associations identified in existing studies do not establish causality for educators teaching across levels (Chen et al., 2025; Dorukbaşı & Cansoy, 2024). Accordingly, classroom management, preparation time, and lesson adaptation should be considered jointly when investigating cross-level teaching.

Professional learning is another relevant strand of evidence. A meta-analysis by Kahmann et al. (2022) reported improvements in differentiated-instruction knowledge and practice following professional development, while a review of teacher-preparation programs highlighted the roles of active learning, collaboration, and reflection (Langelaan et al., 2024). A professional-development design study further illustrates the importance of planning training around authentic teaching tasks (Meutstege et al., 2023). Research on primary-school professional learning communities links collaboration with teachers' reported performance, while a broader meta-analysis associates such communities with teachers' efficacy beliefs (Liu et al., 2025; Mydin et al., 2024). Studies of collaborative inquiry among teacher educators reinforce the relevance of collective reflection (Avgitidou et al., 2024). However, syntheses of professional development find heterogeneous outcomes and caution that participation alone does not demonstrate improved pupil learning (Sims et al., 2025; Ventista & Brown, 2023; Visscher et al., 2025). Online professional learning also depends on interacting with individual, technological, and institutional conditions (Wang & Hu, 2025).

Research published in the *Journal of Integrated Elementary Education* provides an important elementary-specific point of comparison. Asmahasanah et al. (2023) documented first-grade teachers' responses to curricular implementation challenges, including information seeking, webinars, and collegial discussion. Marshalina (2026) examined how elementary teachers using content and language integrated learning combined scaffolding, active learning,

and multimodal resources to manage simultaneous subject and language demands. Hasanah and Suprihatiningrum (2026) showed how pedagogical adjustment and peer collaboration were situated within leadership and inclusive-school practices. These studies illuminate different dimensions of elementary teaching, but each examines instructional responsiveness within its own school-level context. They cannot be taken as evidence that the same decisions necessarily occur when teachers also assume college teaching responsibilities.

Across these strands, a specific gap becomes visible. Existing studies explain how teachers differentiate lessons, experience professional demands, and participate in learning communities (Ardenlid et al., 2025; Bi et al., 2023; Langelaan et al., 2024). They also show that student support and classroom interaction may vary with instructional context (de Ruig et al., 2023; Sulla et al., 2023). However, these separate lines of scholarship offer limited integrated evidence about educators who have actually taught both elementary pupils and college students: how they describe calibrating guidance, managing contrasting expectations, reorganizing preparation, and drawing on available professional support. The gap is not the absence of work on differentiation or teaching transitions, but the limited attention to these demands as interconnected experiences within the accounts of the same educators. This question matters in elementary education because decisions made within cross-level teaching arrangements may shape the attention, preparation, and guidance available to younger learners.

The present study responds through a qualitative case study at a private educational institution in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines. Rather than testing the effectiveness of a teaching intervention, it examines the reported experiences of four licensed educators who have taught at both educational levels, including two Grade 6 pupils and two college students, to provide complementary perspectives. In keeping with the study's constructivist orientation, the analytical focus is on teachers' descriptions of how they adjust explanations, learning activities, participation, and support across different settings. The specific empirical contribution is an integrated, context-bound account of their perceived pedagogical choices and the practical circumstances surrounding them, not a claim of statistical generalizability or demonstrated learning gains.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore the pedagogical strategies and challenges of educators teaching across elementary and college levels. It asks how these educators describe (a) instructional strategies and their adjustment to learners' readiness, (b) challenges involving engagement, classroom organization, preparation, and time, (c) responses used to manage these demands, and (d) professional learning and support. By relating these accounts to the conditions of elementary instruction, the study seeks to inform a more

context-sensitive understanding of adaptive pedagogy and identify questions for further research on cross-level teaching arrangements.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how educators with experience teaching at both elementary and college levels described their pedagogical strategies, instructional challenges, and professional support. The case was situated within a single private educational institution in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines. Examining these experiences in a shared institutional context made it possible to consider teaching decisions alongside the classroom and organizational circumstances described by participants. A case study was appropriate for this context-dependent inquiry, which sought an in-depth account rather than statistical generalization (Merriam, 1998). Piaget's (1972) constructivist account of knowledge development provided a conceptual perspective for considering reported differences in learners' readiness and guidance needs; it was not used to assign learners to developmental stages or to measure cognitive change.

Participants comprised four licensed teachers, two Grade 6 pupils, and two college students. The teachers were selected because they had at least five years of teaching experience and had taught at both elementary and college levels. These inclusion criteria prioritized direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation rather than statistical representativeness. The four teachers provided the principal with accounts of instructional decisions and cross-level challenges. The pupils and college students were included to offer complementary perspectives on teaching practices at their respective levels. All participants were recruited within the institutional context of the case.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. The researchers used interviews as the principal research instrument, maintaining a shared focus on teaching practices and challenges while allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences. Interviews were conducted mainly in English; Bisaya was used when needed to support comprehension or expression. The interviews were audio-recorded, and field notes documented participants' accounts and the relevant interview context. These sources captured participants' descriptions of teaching and learning experiences; they did not constitute direct observation or independent measurement of classroom instruction or student outcomes.

Interview responses were examined through thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Responses were categorized, compared, and interpreted to identify reported patterns and contrasts concerning pedagogical strategies, instructional adaptation to different educational levels, teaching challenges, ways of responding to these challenges, and professional growth and

support. As instructional strategies and level-specific adjustments addressed overlapping issues, these areas are presented together in the Results section. This organization reflects a synthesis of the reported themes rather than a separate quantitative comparison of participants or teaching strategies.

The analysis was grounded in interview accounts, supplemented by field notes that provided contextual information about the interview process. Including teachers and students widened the perspectives available, but the findings primarily synthesize the teachers' descriptions rather than systematically comparing participant groups. Accordingly, the analysis is treated as a context-specific account of reported experiences; it does not quantify theme prevalence, document classroom implementation directly, or demonstrate changes in learning outcomes.

Institutional ethical clearance and permission from school administrators were obtained before data collection. Adult participants gave informed consent, and parental or guardian consent and age-appropriate assent were obtained for Grade 6 pupils. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the study's purpose. Pseudonyms were used in reporting, and research materials were stored securely to protect confidentiality.

3. Results

The interview data were organized into closely related findings concerning instructional guidance and learner independence, challenges of cross-level teaching, responses to those challenges, and sources of professional learning. Teachers described differences between elementary and college contexts while also reporting adjustments within each level. The following sections present these patterns as accounts of participants' experiences, not as independent evidence of instructional effectiveness.

3.1 Guided Elementary Instruction and Greater Independence in College Teaching

Teachers described modifying both the organization of learning activities and the amount of direct support provided when teaching elementary pupils and college students. In their accounts of elementary teaching, they emphasized guided instruction, repetition, simplified explanations, and structured interactive tasks. In contrast, accounts of college teaching placed greater emphasis on independent assignments, learner-centered discussions, and opportunities for reflection. The principal differences concerned instructional guidance, lesson presentation, learning activities, and patterns of participation (Table 1).

The teachers also described strategies that were not exclusive to one educational level. Contextualized examples were used to connect lesson content with familiar or everyday situations, while reflection on classroom experiences

informed subsequent instructional decisions. Across both settings, the teachers reported modifying explanations and activities in response to learners' comprehension, academic readiness, and participation. Thus, the distinction between closer elementary-level guidance and greater college-level independence did not eliminate the need for adjustments within each group.

The reported contrast concerned how learning activities and participation were organized. Interactive and guided activities featured in teachers' accounts of elementary lessons, whereas discussion and independent assignments were emphasized in their descriptions of college teaching. These patterns reflect instructional approaches described by participants rather than observed lesson episodes or quantified differences in strategy use.

Table 1.

Reported Instructional Approaches across Educational Levels

Instructional dimension	Elementary-level teaching	College-level teaching
Teacher guidance	Closer guidance, repetition, and teacher direction	Greater emphasis on independent learning tasks
Explanations and discussion	Simplified explanations and direct clarification	Learner-centered and reflective discussion
Learning activities	Structured and interactive activities	Independent tasks and discussion-based activities
Student participation	Participation was organized with more direct teacher guidance	Greater learner responsibility in discussion and tasks

Source: *Thematic summaries of participant interviews.*

3.2 Learner Differences, Classroom Management, and Preparation Demands

The teachers identified difficulties associated with learners' developmental and academic readiness, the complexity of lesson content, classroom management, engagement, and the organization of teaching responsibilities. Their accounts grouped these difficulties into three overlapping areas: responding to varied learning needs, managing classroom behavior and participation, and preparing instruction across two educational levels (Table 2).

Differences in learners' readiness required teachers to reconsider explanations, learning tasks, and levels of assistance. The teachers particularly noted that younger pupils needed closer supervision and more structured classroom routines. They also described the challenge of sustaining participation while accommodating differences in learners' needs and comprehension. Alongside these classroom concerns, preparing separate lessons and instructional materials for elementary and college classes placed demands on planning time and the allocation of teaching responsibilities.

The challenges summarized in Table 2 were interconnected in the teachers’ descriptions. Simplifying difficult content related both to learners’ readiness and to the preparation of instructional materials. Similarly, classroom routines addressed behavior and provided a structure for pupil participation. The categories represent types of challenges described in the interviews and are not ordered by frequency or severity.

Table 2.

Challenges Described in Cross-Level Teaching

Challenge area	Difficulties described in teachers’ accounts
Learner readiness and instructional adaptation	Differences in developmental and academic readiness; varied learning needs; adapting strategies and simplifying complex content for younger learners
Classroom behavior and engagement	Managing behavior and participation; providing closer supervision of younger pupils; sustaining engagement in classroom activities
Preparation and time allocation	Developing level-appropriate lessons and instructional materials while balancing teaching assignments and available preparation time

Source: Thematic summaries of participant interviews.

3.3 Reflective Adjustment, Classroom Routines, and Peer Collaboration

In response to these challenges, the teachers reported using reflective teaching, established classroom routines, contextualized instruction, engaging activities, time-management strategies, and peer collaboration. At the classroom level, routines were described as a means of organizing behavior and participation, while interactive activities were used when learners’ attention or involvement required additional support. Teachers also drew on familiar examples to make lesson content more accessible.

Instructional adjustment continued beyond individual lessons. The teachers described reviewing classroom experiences and learners’ responses before revising their teaching practices. To manage responsibilities across educational levels, they reported organizing preparation and teaching time. Collaboration with colleagues provided opportunities to exchange instructional ideas and discuss practical classroom concerns. These accounts show the range of responses reported by participants, without establishing the comparative effectiveness of individual strategies.

These responses addressed different aspects of teaching. Classroom routines and engaging activities concerned immediate participation and behavior; reflection and contextualization concerned instructional adjustments; and time management and collaboration related to responsibilities extending beyond

individual lessons. The teachers described using these strategies, although the study did not independently examine their effectiveness.

3.4 Formal Training and Informal Sources of Professional Learning

The teachers identified both organized professional development and work-based learning as sources of instructional support. Seminars and workshops were described as opportunities to learn teaching and classroom-management approaches, while webinars and training activities were associated with updating instructional practices. The teachers also referred to peer collaboration and professional learning communities as settings in which classroom experiences and instructional ideas could be shared.

In addition to formal and collegial learning opportunities, participants described their own classroom experiences as a basis for adjusting instruction over time. They associated these sources of support with greater confidence in adapting lessons and managing different classroom expectations. This finding concerns teachers' perceptions of their professional growth; changes in instructional competence or student learning were not independently measured in the reported data. The accounts encompassed both organized professional-learning activities and informal exchanges. Workshops, webinars, and training opportunities were described as sources of ideas, while collegial interaction and accumulated teaching experience informed subsequent instructional decisions. The study did not measure changes in teaching competence or student learning following these activities.

4. Discussion

4.1 Calibrating Instructional Guidance and Learner Independence

The most salient finding concerns how teachers described changing the balance between instructional guidance and learner independence across educational levels. Their emphasis on simplified explanations, repetition, and structured activities in elementary classrooms, compared with independent tasks and reflective discussion in college teaching, suggests a process of calibrating support to perceived readiness rather than applying completely separate pedagogical repertoires. Crucially, these are teachers' reported decisions; the study did not establish that specific approaches improved comprehension, engagement, or achievement.

A constructivist reading of this pattern places learners' existing understanding at the center of instructional judgment. Piaget (1972) highlights changes in reasoning and knowledge construction, but the present interviews cannot be used to classify pupils or college students into specific developmental stages. Likewise, differentiated instruction emphasizes the need to respond to learners' readiness and circumstances rather than assume that age or grade level

determines how support should be provided (Tomlinson, 2014). Under this interpretation, closer teacher guidance and increasing learner autonomy are not competing ideals: teachers may vary their relative emphasis according to the task, learners' responses, and the classroom context.

This interpretation is consistent with the review by de Ruig et al. (2023), which connects supportive elementary classroom interactions with particular dimensions of pupils' self-regulated learning, and with Dominguez and Svihla's (2023) account of the importance of responsive scaffolding. However, those studies do not directly establish how individual educators adjust instruction while moving between elementary and college assignments. The present case adds a narrower, context-specific perspective: teachers portrayed the amount and form of guidance as an instructional decision made across two markedly different settings. The evidence supports this account of perceived adaptation, not a claim that one educational level always requires dependence or that independence is absent in elementary learning.

An important qualification is that autonomy is not an educational destination reserved for older learners. Even in elementary classrooms, carefully structured participation can involve pupils making choices and explaining their reasoning; conversely, college students may still need substantial explanation for unfamiliar content. The teachers' accounts support a difference in emphasis, not a categorical division between guided elementary learning and autonomous tertiary learning. This distinction keeps the study aligned with the view of instructional support as contingent on task demands and learner responses (Dominguez & Svihla, 2023; Zachariou & Bonneville-Roussy, 2024).

4.2 The Interdependence of Pedagogical and Organizational Demands

A second insight is that the challenges of cross-level teaching were described as pedagogical and organizational at the same time. Teachers reported the need to address varied levels of readiness, classroom behavior, participation, and content complexity while also preparing different materials and allocating time across their teaching responsibilities. These demands may reinforce one another. For example, presenting complex ideas through more accessible explanations requires instructional planning, while maintaining participation among younger pupils can also require routines and closer supervision. This linkage helps explain why adaptation was described as more than choosing an appropriate activity.

Studies of differentiated instruction likewise show that lesson preparation and available resources are part of responding to heterogeneous classrooms (Grecu, 2023; Daşcıoğlu & Bümen, 2025). Similarly, the synthesis by de Ruig et al. (2023) indicates that supportive classroom conditions can be relevant to elementary pupils' self-regulatory development. However, its findings do not imply uniform benefits across all outcomes. In the present study, teachers'

accounts of routines and supervision can be read against this literature. However, the interviews did not provide direct observations of classroom management or independent measures of pupil self-regulation.

The reported preparation demands further suggest that differences between elementary and college teaching cannot be explained solely by the ages of pupils and students. Curricular requirements, teaching schedules, and access to planning time may also constrain what educators can implement. Bi et al. (2023) similarly identified multiple factors associated with teachers' differentiated instruction, although their study concerned a different educational setting. Taken together, these perspectives indicate that pedagogical responsiveness may depend on conditions of work as well as professional judgment. For institutions employing cross-level educators, reviewing preparation time, teaching assignments, and access to instructional resources is therefore a reasonable implication. It remains a proposal arising from reported challenges rather than an intervention evaluated in this study.

The practical significance of this interdependence is especially clear when considering elementary pupils. Teachers' time and attention are finite, while direct explanation, routines, and adaptation for varied readiness all require planning. In a cross-level assignment, the need to prepare college discussions and independent tasks may coexist with the need to develop accessible materials for younger pupils. The present case does not measure whether either set of responsibilities displaced the other. It does, however, identify that competing preparation demands were part of the teachers' experience, making organizational support a legitimate focus for future observation-based research.

4.3 Reflective Practice and Collaboration in Everyday Instructional Adaptation

The teachers' reported responses to classroom challenges reveal an iterative understanding of adaptation. Established routines, contextualized explanations, interactive tasks, reflections on classroom experiences, and peer exchanges were described as ways to address perceived difficulties. These responses differ in form but share an orientation toward reconsidering instruction in light of particular classroom conditions. Accordingly, the relevant finding is not that any single strategy is universally successful, but that participants described adaptation as an ongoing element of their teaching work.

Collie and Martin (2016) conceptualize adaptability as a capacity for responding to changing and uncertain professional demands. The participants' accounts are compatible with this perspective because they referred to revising instruction and organizing teaching responsibilities when expectations differed. Their descriptions of reviewing lessons also resonate with scholarship on reflective practice, which frames reflection as a means of reconsidering professional action (Mohamed et al., 2022). Nevertheless, no systematic

observation of teachers' moment-by-moment decisions was reported. Reflection and adaptability should therefore be treated here as described practices and plausible interpretive concepts, not as independently assessed competencies.

Peer collaboration adds a relational dimension to these responses. The teachers reported exchanging ideas and discussing instructional concerns with colleagues rather than relying exclusively on individual trial and error. Research on professional learning communities likewise identifies collaboration as a relevant feature of teachers' professional practices (Liu et al., 2025). In this case, collegial interaction appears in participants' accounts as a readily available source of support. However, the data do not establish how frequently it occurred, what advice was exchanged, or whether it led to observable changes in classroom instruction. An important implication for elementary teacher preparation is therefore to create opportunities for educators to explain and evaluate their instructional choices, not merely to assemble a larger repertoire of teaching techniques.

4.4 Professional Learning as a Perceived Resource Rather Than a Measured Outcome

The professional-development accounts extend this interpretation beyond individual lessons. Teachers identified seminars, workshops, webinars, professional learning communities, and classroom experience as sources of ideas and support for teaching across levels. Together, these examples suggest that participants viewed professional growth as a combination of formal learning opportunities, reflection, and collegial exchange. However, their reported confidence in adapting instruction is an aspect of perceived professional development and should not be equated with demonstrated improvements in pedagogical competence or pupil learning.

This distinction matters when connecting the case with intervention research. Kahmann et al. (2022) reported that professional development programs can support differentiated instruction knowledge and practice, while improvements in students' learning cannot be presumed from participation alone. Broader syntheses also draw attention to variation in the features and outcomes of teacher professional learning (Sims et al., 2025; Ventista & Brown, 2023). These studies provide a rationale for considering the substance, continuity, and classroom relevance of learning opportunities rather than assuming that attendance at isolated events produces instructional change. They do not, however, verify the effectiveness of the workshops, webinars, or exchanges described by the present participants.

For institutions serving elementary learners, a cautious practical implication is to connect training with opportunities to plan age-appropriate lessons, examine classroom examples, seek peer feedback, and revisit difficulties over time. Such support may be especially pertinent when teachers divide their work between

elementary and college settings. The current evidence warrants attention to these potential supports, but does not recommend that any particular professional-development model has been shown to improve outcomes in the institution studied.

These implications should be framed as a professional-learning agenda rather than a prescribed intervention. Relevant activities might include jointly examining examples of elementary tasks, identifying points at which pupils need additional scaffolding, and discussing how teachers make changes when a lesson does not proceed as expected. Such approaches are compatible with the professional-learning literature, but determining their value would require documenting implementation and assessing outcomes rather than relying only on participants' perceptions (Langelaan et al., 2024; Visscher et al., 2025).

4.5 Contribution, Limitations, and Directions for Further Research

The findings provide a context-specific account of cross-level teaching as the coordination of instructional guidance, learner participation, classroom organization, preparation, and professional support. This is the study's principal empirical contribution. Whereas the research literature often examines differentiation, scaffolding, classroom management, or teacher professional development separately, the participants described these demands as coexisting within their own teaching responsibilities. For elementary education, the resulting perspective is that responsive guidance should be understood in relation to both pupils' learning needs and the practical conditions under which teachers plan and enact instruction. The study does not establish a new causal model or test the effectiveness of an integrated teaching approach.

Several limitations constrain this interpretation. The single-institution case included four purposively selected teachers, two Grade 6 pupils, and two college students, which limits transferability beyond comparable settings. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and field notes, without reported classroom observations or direct assessments of teaching quality and learning outcomes. Although the study included pupils and college students, the presented findings do not separately trace their accounts or systematically compare them with the teachers' perspectives. Moreover, the reporting does not provide participant quotations, a detailed coding trail, or sufficient examples of discrepant accounts to allow readers to assess how individual responses supported the final themes. These are limitations of the available reporting and evidence, not grounds for assuming that unreported procedures did not occur.

The limited reporting of participant-level excerpts and coding decisions also restricts the extent to which readers can trace individual accounts to each theme. This constrains comparisons between teacher and student perspectives and warrants caution when considering the transferability of the findings. The current

evidence is most appropriately understood as a thematic account of reported experiences rather than a verified description of classroom effectiveness.

Future research could combine interviews with observations of the same educators across both educational levels to examine when and why instructional guidance is increased, reduced, or redesigned. Explicit comparison of teacher and student accounts, accompanied by anonymized excerpts and a transparent description of theme development, would strengthen the evidential basis for qualitative interpretations. Comparative studies across institutions and teaching arrangements could distinguish challenges related to learner needs from those related to workload and institutional support. Finally, longitudinal or mixed-methods designs with appropriate outcome measures would be needed to examine whether specific professional learning arrangements are associated with demonstrable changes in teaching practices or in elementary pupils' learning experiences.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative case study indicates that educators who have taught at both elementary and college levels described pedagogical adaptation as the ongoing adjustment of instructional guidance, learning activities, and classroom expectations to perceived learner readiness. Teachers reported closer guidance, clearer explanations, and structured participation for elementary pupils, while placing greater emphasis on independent tasks and reflective discussion with college students. They also described adapting instruction amid challenges involving classroom management, learner engagement, content complexity, preparation time, and teaching responsibilities. Reflective practice, classroom routines, contextualized examples, peer exchanges, and formal professional learning were reported as resources for managing these demands, not as practices whose effectiveness was independently established.

The study contributes a context-specific account of cross-level pedagogical responsiveness in which instructional choices are inseparable from classroom organization, preparation, and available professional support. For elementary education, this account suggests that supporting adaptive teaching entails more than training educators in particular techniques: institutions may also need to provide opportunities for developmentally responsive planning, collegial reflection, and realistic allocation of preparation time. These are practice-oriented implications rather than demonstrated effects on pupils' learning. Because the evidence comes from a small, purposively selected case in one institution and is presented mainly through summarized interviews, the findings should not be generalized statistically or interpreted as causal. Future research should integrate classroom observations with clearly attributed teacher and student accounts

across settings to examine how these reported adjustments are enacted and experienced by elementary learners.

Declarations

All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and declare no competing interests. The study was conducted in accordance with applicable research ethics requirements, with informed consent obtained and participant confidentiality maintained. Grammarly was used to assist with academic language refinement and citation consistency checks. No research data were generated using artificial intelligence tools. All authors independently reviewed and verified the manuscript and accept full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and reliability of its content.

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