

Investigating Teacher Multitasking Practices and Their Implications for Student Learning

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the forms of multitasking carried out by educators at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan, its impact on the learning process, and the strategies used to manage multitasking. This research employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that educators perform multiple tasks simultaneously and sequentially, including teaching, duty supervision, ceremony coaching, lesson plan evaluation, counseling, religious activities, *Subuh* prayer assistance, and extracurricular guidance. Multitasking provides benefits such as time efficiency and role flexibility but also poses challenges such as fatigue, stress, and decreased instructional focus. Therefore, managerial support and proportional task distribution are essential to maintain teaching quality.

Keywords: Multitasking, Educators, Teacher Workload, Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a strategic role in the success of educational institutions, particularly at the elementary school level, where they are responsible not only for delivering academic content but also for fostering students' character development, social skills, and emotional growth (Islamiah et al., 2024; Ridlo & Yanti, 2024; Schmitz et al., 2023). In contemporary educational settings, the responsibilities of teachers have expanded significantly due to curriculum reforms, technological advancements, increasing administrative demands, and growing societal expectations regarding educational quality (Skinner et al., 2021; Zguir et al., 2021). Consequently, teachers are expected to perform multiple professional functions simultaneously while maintaining high standards of instructional effectiveness and student engagement.

The increasing complexity of teachers' responsibilities has made multitasking an inevitable aspect of educational practice. Multitasking refers to the ability to perform or manage multiple tasks within the same period or in rapid succession. In schools, teachers frequently alternate between classroom instruction, lesson preparation, student assessment, administrative reporting, extracurricular supervision, and various institutional activities (Nadan et al., 2024; Sutiani et al., 2021). While such practices are often perceived as indicators of adaptability and professional commitment, they also require substantial cognitive, emotional, and physical resources from educators. Previous studies have highlighted both the advantages and disadvantages of

multitasking in professional environments. On the one hand, multitasking may enhance organizational efficiency, flexibility, and responsiveness to institutional needs (Abidin et al., 2022; Thoyib et al., 2024). On the other hand, cognitive research suggests that frequent task switching can reduce concentration, increase the likelihood of errors, diminish productivity, and contribute to mental fatigue. For teachers, these consequences may directly affect instructional quality, decision-making processes, and overall professional performance, particularly when multiple responsibilities compete for attention within limited working hours.

In the educational context, multitasking has become increasingly common due to institutional demands and resource constraints. Teachers are often required to assume additional responsibilities beyond their primary instructional duties, including administrative management, student counseling, event coordination, extracurricular coaching, and participation in community or religious activities (Ayeni et al., 2024; Halisoh & Sain, 2024). Such conditions are particularly evident in elementary schools, where limited human resources frequently necessitate the distribution of diverse responsibilities among teaching staff. As a result, multitasking has evolved from an optional professional skill into a practical necessity for many educators.

Despite the growing prevalence of multitasking among teachers, existing research has primarily focused on its impact within business organizations, healthcare institutions, and corporate workplaces. Studies examining multitasking in educational settings have generally emphasized workload management, job stress, or teacher performance, while relatively limited attention has been given to understanding how teachers themselves experience and interpret multitasking in their daily professional lives (Lee et al., 2024; Srivastava et al., 2022). Furthermore, there remains a lack of qualitative investigations exploring the subjective meanings attached to multitasking practices and their implications for both instructional effectiveness and teacher well-being.

The phenomenon is also evident at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan, where teachers are responsible for a wide range of academic and non-academic duties. In addition to classroom teaching, teachers participate in school duty rotations, ceremony supervision, lesson administration, religious guidance programs, congregational dawn prayer assistance, and extracurricular activities. The accumulation of these responsibilities requires teachers to continuously manage competing priorities, adapt to changing demands, and maintain professional performance under varying conditions. Understanding how teachers navigate these responsibilities is essential for identifying both the opportunities and challenges associated with multitasking in elementary education.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of teachers engaged in multitasking practices at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan. Using a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to examine the forms of multitasking performed by teachers, the meanings they attribute to these experiences, the perceived effects on teaching and learning processes, and the implications for teacher well-being and educational management. By providing an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences, this research is expected to contribute to the development of more balanced workload policies and sustainable management strategies that support both educational quality and teacher welfare.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of teachers engaged in multitasking practices at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan. A phenomenological approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to investigate how teachers perceive, experience, and interpret the multiple responsibilities they perform in their daily professional activities (Alam, 2021). Through this

approach, the research focused on capturing the subjective meanings attached to multitasking and its influence on teachers' professional lives.

The participants of this study consisted of teachers and school administrators who were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in teaching and additional school responsibilities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The interviews were conducted to gain detailed insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to multitasking. Observations were carried out to understand how multitasking practices occurred within the natural school environment, while relevant documents, including teaching schedules, administrative records, and school activity reports, were examined to support and enrich the findings.

Data analysis followed the phenomenological procedures proposed by Younas et al. (2023), involving data organization, significant statement identification, thematic clustering, textural and structural description development, and the synthesis of participants' shared experiences. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. These procedures were applied to enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of teacher multitasking in the elementary school context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Multitasking as an Integral Part of Teachers' Professional Responsibilities

Participants described their work routines as extending beyond classroom instruction, requiring them to perform multiple responsibilities within a single working day. These responsibilities included teaching, preparing learning materials, completing administrative reports, supervising students, participating in school duty schedules, and supporting various school programs. Most participants perceived multitasking as a normal condition rather than an exceptional situation. They explained that the limited number of personnel and the diverse needs of the school often required teachers to assume additional roles. As a result, multitasking was viewed as part of their professional commitment to ensuring that school activities continued effectively and efficiently.

Teachers reported that their daily schedules frequently involved rapid transitions between different tasks. A participant explained that after completing classroom instruction, they were often required to attend administrative meetings, supervise student activities, and prepare documents for future lessons. Such conditions required continuous adjustments and the ability to manage competing priorities.

Several participants emphasized that multitasking was not merely about handling numerous tasks but also about balancing different expectations from students, colleagues, school leaders, and parents. The need to satisfy these expectations created a dynamic working environment in which teachers constantly shifted between instructional, managerial, and social roles. Although participants generally accepted multitasking as part of their professional reality, they acknowledged that the increasing complexity of responsibilities demanded greater self-discipline and organizational skills. Their experiences reflected a professional culture in which adaptability and flexibility were considered essential competencies for sustaining educational services.

The lived experiences of participants suggest that multitasking has evolved into a structural characteristic of teachers' work. Rather than being perceived solely as an additional burden, it has become embedded within the organizational practices of the school and shapes how teachers understand their professional identities.

The Dual Impact of Multitasking on Teaching Performance and Teacher Well-Being

Participants described multitasking as a phenomenon that generated both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, teachers believed that multitasking enhanced their adaptability and enabled them to respond quickly to emerging school needs. They reported becoming more skilled in organizing activities, prioritizing tasks, and managing limited time resources. Several teachers stated that their involvement in multiple school activities strengthened their relationships with students. Participation in extracurricular programs, religious activities, and school events provided additional opportunities for interaction outside the classroom. These interactions helped teachers better understand students' personal characteristics and learning needs.

However, participants also reported significant challenges associated with multitasking. The need to complete multiple responsibilities within restricted timeframes often resulted in physical exhaustion and mental fatigue. Teachers indicated that they frequently continued working after formal school hours to complete administrative requirements and prepare instructional materials. The findings further revealed that excessive multitasking occasionally affected instructional focus. Some participants acknowledged experiencing difficulty maintaining concentration when administrative deadlines coincided with teaching responsibilities. In such situations, they felt that their attention was divided between educational and non-educational tasks.

Several participants expressed concerns regarding long-term professional sustainability. Continuous exposure to heavy workloads was perceived as a potential source of stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced work-life balance. Teachers noted that prolonged multitasking could diminish motivation and increase feelings of professional burnout. Participants perceived multitasking as a double-edged phenomenon. While it contributed to organizational effectiveness and professional growth, it simultaneously created pressures that could affect teaching quality and personal well-being when not adequately managed.

Table 1. Perceived Impacts of Multitasking Among Teachers

Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Increased adaptability	Physical fatigue
Better time-management skills	Mental exhaustion
Greater involvement in school programs	Reduced instructional focus
Stronger teacher–student relationships	Increased work-related stress
Enhanced problem-solving abilities	Work-life imbalance
Improved organizational responsiveness	Risk of professional burnout

Table 1 demonstrates that multitasking has both positive and negative implications for teachers. On the positive side, multitasking enhances teachers' adaptability, time-management skills, problem-solving abilities, and responsiveness to organizational demands while also increasing their involvement in school programs and strengthening teacher–student relationships. These benefits enable teachers to contribute more effectively to both academic and non-academic activities within the school environment. Several challenges associated with multitasking, including physical fatigue, mental exhaustion, reduced instructional focus, increased work-related stress, and difficulties in maintaining a healthy work–life balance. The accumulation of multiple responsibilities often requires teachers to extend their work beyond formal school hours, which may negatively affect their well-being and increase the risk of professional burnout. Therefore, multitasking can be viewed as a double-edged phenomenon that supports organizational effectiveness and professional development while simultaneously creating pressures that may affect teachers' performance and welfare if not managed appropriately.

Coping Strategies and Professional Adaptation in Managing Multitasking

Teachers actively developed various strategies to manage the demands of multitasking. One of the most frequently reported approaches was prioritization. Participants explained that they routinely categorized tasks according to urgency and importance, allowing them to allocate time and resources more effectively. Time management emerged as another important coping mechanism. Teachers described creating daily schedules, preparing instructional materials in advance, and organizing administrative work during specific periods. These practices helped them reduce task accumulation and maintain productivity throughout the school week.

Collaboration among colleagues also played a significant role in supporting multitasking practices. Participants highlighted the importance of teamwork, information sharing, and mutual assistance in completing school responsibilities. Informal cooperation among teachers often helped reduce individual workloads and facilitated smoother implementation of school programs.

In addition to organizational strategies, participants relied on personal resilience and intrinsic motivation. Many teachers expressed a strong sense of responsibility toward their students and viewed their professional duties as a form of service. This perspective encouraged them to remain committed despite demanding workloads and challenging circumstances.

The findings further indicated that leadership support contributed significantly to teachers' ability to cope with multitasking demands. Participants appreciated school leaders who maintained open communication, provided guidance, and considered teachers' workload conditions when assigning responsibilities. Supportive leadership was perceived as an important factor in reducing work-related stress. Taken together, these experiences demonstrate that successful management of multitasking depends not only on individual competencies but also on organizational support systems. Teachers' ability to adapt to multiple responsibilities is strengthened when effective leadership, collegial collaboration, and structured workload management are present within the school environment.

Discussion

The findings indicate that multitasking has become an inherent component of teachers' professional responsibilities in elementary schools. Teachers are required to simultaneously perform instructional, administrative, supervisory, and extracurricular duties, reflecting the increasingly complex nature of contemporary educational work. This finding supports the argument that the teaching profession has evolved beyond traditional classroom instruction and now encompasses diverse organizational responsibilities that demand flexibility and adaptability (Boevende Pauw et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022). The experiences of participants demonstrate that multitasking is not merely an individual choice but is shaped by institutional expectations, resource limitations, and school management practices.

The study further reveals that multitasking contributes positively to teachers' professional development by enhancing adaptability, organizational skills, and time-management capabilities. Teachers who regularly engage in multiple tasks develop greater capacity to prioritize responsibilities and respond effectively to changing educational demands. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that multitasking can improve flexibility and operational efficiency when individuals possess adequate coping mechanisms and organizational support (Gordon, 2023; Kanawapee et al., 2022). In the educational context, such competencies are essential for ensuring the continuity of both academic and non-academic school programs.

Another important finding concerns the influence of multitasking on teacher–student relationships. The involvement of teachers in extracurricular activities, religious programs, and school events provides additional opportunities for interaction beyond classroom settings. These

interactions foster stronger emotional connections, improve communication, and enable teachers to better understand students' academic and personal needs. Such findings are consistent with the view that meaningful teacher–student relationships contribute significantly to student engagement, motivation, and overall educational outcomes (Barkhuizen, 2021; Morgado et al., 2021). Therefore, multitasking may indirectly support holistic student development when additional responsibilities facilitate positive social interactions.

Despite its benefits, the findings also highlight the negative consequences of excessive multitasking. Participants reported experiencing physical fatigue, mental exhaustion, and reduced concentration as a result of managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously. These findings are supported by cognitive theories suggesting that frequent task switching imposes additional cognitive demands and reduces the efficiency of information processing (Nasucha et al., 2023)(Faiz et al., 2023). Similarly, research on workplace performance has shown that excessive multitasking can decrease productivity, increase errors, and impair decision-making quality, particularly when tasks require sustained attention and complex cognitive engagement (Duarte et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023).

The study additionally demonstrates a significant relationship between multitasking and teacher well-being. Teachers frequently extended their work beyond official school hours to complete administrative tasks and prepare instructional materials, creating challenges in maintaining a balance between professional and personal life. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing that excessive workload is a major contributor to occupational stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout among educators (Ansley et al., 2021). Consequently, the sustainability of teacher performance depends not only on individual resilience but also on organizational efforts to ensure a reasonable distribution of responsibilities.

The findings underscore the importance of institutional support in managing multitasking demands. Teachers who received support from school leaders and colleagues demonstrated greater ability to cope with workload pressures and maintain professional effectiveness. Collaborative work environments, participatory leadership, and equitable task allocation were perceived as critical factors in reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction. This finding supports the perspective that effective educational leadership plays a vital role in fostering teacher commitment, well-being, and organizational effectiveness. Therefore, schools should develop comprehensive workload management strategies that balance organizational needs with teachers' professional capacity and well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that multitasking has become an integral part of teachers' professional lives at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan, where educators are required to perform various instructional, administrative, supervisory, religious, and extracurricular responsibilities simultaneously. The findings reveal that multitasking produces both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, it enhances teachers' adaptability, time-management skills, organizational responsiveness, and engagement in school activities. However, excessive multitasking may lead to physical fatigue, mental exhaustion, reduced instructional focus, work-related stress, and an increased risk of professional burnout. The study also highlights that effective time management, collegial collaboration, and supportive school leadership are essential factors in helping teachers cope with multitasking demands. Therefore, schools should implement balanced workload management strategies to maintain educational quality while safeguarding teacher well-being and professional sustainability.

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