

Article**Emotional Boundaries to Identity Conflict of Multigrade Elementary School Pupils In Bohol**

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Abstract: Multigrade classrooms present unique social and pedagogical dynamics that can significantly impact the psychosocial well-being of learners. The study aims to determine the relationship between the level of emotional boundaries in terms of self-regulation, empathy, and respectful turn-taking, and identity conflict in terms of sense of belonging, role and status clarity, and peer relationship adjustment among multigrade elementary school pupils based on their teachers' observation in Bugang Elementary School Bilar, Bohol. The study utilizes a descriptive-correlational quantitative research design and it deploys a complete enumeration. The data was collected through a five-point Likert scale for all 78 pupils in Bugang Elementary School. The study utilized a Weighted Mean to describe the variable levels and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) to test the relationship of the two variables. The results show a high level of emotional boundary with a Grand Mean of 4.10 and a high level of identity adjustment with a Grand Mean of 4.06. The result of r -value=0.442 and p -value=0.000 subsequently rejected the null hypothesis. Moreover, the multigrade elementary school pupils in Bilar, Bohol possess highly adaptive psychological assets. The findings indicate that the pupils' emotional boundary control is directly intertwined with their social identity stability. The higher the emotional boundary, the higher their ability to stabilize their identity in the social setting. The findings were able to create an intervention plan titled "Project ECHO (Enhancing Classroom Harmony and Overcoming identity conflict)". Its aim is to further institutionalize Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies within multigrade education frameworks.

Keywords: Emotional Boundaries, Identity Conflict, Multigrade Pupils, Self-Regulation, Empathy, Respectful Turn-Taking

Introduction

Emotional boundaries and identity development are important to pupils' successful adjustment in multigrade classrooms, where learners of different ages and grade

levels regularly interact. Emotional competencies such as self-regulation and empathy support children's social and behavioral development (Cipriano et al., 2023). Likewise, a strong sense of belonging contributes to positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes among learners (Korpershoek et al., 2020). Understanding these factors may therefore explain how multigrade pupils manage emotions, relationships, roles, and identities within diverse classroom environments. Recent scholarship recognizes that multigrade classrooms are complex social environments in which pupils of different ages, abilities, and grade levels learn and interact together. Such arrangements can provide opportunities for cooperation, peer assistance, social interaction, and the development of supportive relationships. Bernardez-Gomez et al. (2025), in a systematic review of recent international studies, identified both opportunities and continuing challenges associated with multigrade teaching. At the learner level, social-emotional competencies are particularly relevant because pupils must regulate their behavior while interacting with classmates who differ developmentally. Hosokawa et al. (2024) demonstrated that social-emotional learning can strengthen children's emotional and interpersonal competencies. Likewise, Main et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of social and emotional skills in supporting positive social identity. These findings suggest that multigrade classrooms may provide meaningful opportunities for developing self-regulation, empathy, cooperation, and positive social identities, but the quality of pupils' experiences may depend on how effectively they adjust to the social demands of mixed-grade learning.

At the same time, multigrade education presents distinctive instructional and social demands that may influence pupils' classroom experiences. Teachers are expected to address different curricular levels, developmental needs, abilities, and behavioral patterns within the same learning environment. Recent studies have consequently concentrated on teachers' experiences, classroom management practices, and pedagogical challenges in multigrade settings. Marasigan et al. (2024), for example, examined the pedagogical strategies and challenges experienced by multigrade teachers, while Bernardez-Gomez et al. (2025) identified instructional organization, teacher preparation, and classroom complexity among recurring concerns in multigrade education. Although these studies contribute to understanding how multigrade classrooms operate, their emphasis is primarily on instructional and teacher-related concerns. Comparatively less attention has been given to pupils' emotional and identity-related experiences, particularly how learners regulate themselves and establish relationships while continuously interacting with younger and older classmates.

This gap is important because children's emotional functioning and social relationships are closely connected with their adjustment within educational environments. De Neve et al. (2023) found that difficulties in emotion regulation were interconnected with students' engagement in learning and their relationships with peers and teachers. Similarly, Cai et al. (2023) reported an important relationship among teacher empathy, students' sense of school belonging, and

learning achievement. Turn-taking is another relevant interpersonal competency because children must learn to coordinate their participation with others during social exchanges; Cosper and Pika (2025) described turn-taking as a multifaceted developmental process involving both comprehension and production. These studies establish the importance of self-regulation, empathy, respectful interaction, belonging, and peer relationships. However, these constructs have rarely been examined together specifically within multigrade classrooms, where differences in age and grade status may create distinctive social roles and interaction patterns. Recent evidence also highlights the importance of belonging and interpersonal relationships in pupils' adjustment to school. Allen et al. (2025), drawing on students' perspectives across countries, emphasized that school belonging is shaped by relationships, acceptance, inclusion, and experiences within the school community. These concerns are particularly relevant to multigrade classrooms because pupils must establish their place within groups containing younger and older learners while maintaining positive peer relationships and appropriate classroom roles. Despite growing research on multigrade pedagogy and social-emotional development, limited empirical attention has been directed toward the relationship between pupils' emotional boundaries and identity-related adjustment in multigrade settings. The present study therefore addressed this gap by examining pupils' self-regulation, empathy, and respectful turn-taking in relation to their sense of belonging, role and status clarity, and peer relationship adjustment in Bilar District, Bohol, during School Year 2025–2026.

Literature Review

Emotional boundaries are important in helping pupils regulate their emotions, understand the feelings of others, and interact appropriately within the classroom. In multigrade settings, where pupils of different ages and grade levels learn together, these competencies can support respectful and cooperative interactions. Self-regulation enables children to manage emotions, attention, and behavior in response to classroom expectations. Robson, Allen, and Howard (2020) found that childhood self-regulation is associated with important developmental outcomes, including social functioning and academic achievement. Similarly, Cipriano et al. (2023) reported that social and emotional learning interventions contribute positively to children's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes. Empathy is also important because it enables pupils to recognize and respond appropriately to others' emotions, while respectful turn-taking supports communication and cooperative participation. Hosokawa et al. (2024) further demonstrated that social-emotional learning can strengthen young children's emotional and interpersonal skills. These findings suggest that self-regulation, empathy, and respectful turn-taking are important aspects of pupils' emotional boundaries within socially diverse classroom environments.

Identity conflict may arise when pupils experience uncertainty concerning their

belonging, roles, social position, and relationships with peers. A strong sense of belonging can provide pupils with feelings of acceptance and connection within their school community. Allen et al. (2021) found through a meta-analytic review that school belonging is associated with individual and social factors, including relationships with teachers and peers. Positive peer relationships are particularly relevant in multigrade classrooms because pupils regularly interact with classmates who differ in age, ability, and grade level. Korpershoek et al. (2020) likewise found that students' sense of school belonging is associated with important motivational, social-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes. Furthermore, positive teacher-child relationships can provide security and support as children develop their identities and adjust to classroom expectations (Spilt & Koomen, 2022). Thus, examining pupils' sense of belonging, role and status clarity, and peer relationship adjustment can provide insight into how multigrade pupils understand their place and relationships within the classroom.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to determine the levels of pupils' emotional boundaries and identity conflict and to examine the relationship between these variables as perceived by teachers in multigrade classrooms. The descriptive component assessed pupils' emotional boundaries in terms of self-regulation, empathy, and respectful turn-taking, while identity conflict was examined in terms of sense of belonging, role and status clarity, and peer relationship adjustment. The correlational component determined whether a statistically significant relationship existed between the two variables. The study was conducted at Bugang Elementary School, Bilar, Bohol, involving public-school teachers handling multigrade classes. Teachers served as respondents because they directly observed pupils' emotional behaviors, classroom interactions, and adjustment across mixed-age and grade-level learning situations.

Data were gathered using a teacher-based survey questionnaire consisting of two major parts. Part I, the Emotional Boundaries Observation Scale, assessed self-regulation, empathy, and respectful turn-taking, while Part II, the Grade-Level Identity Conflict Scale, measured sense of belonging, role and status clarity, and peer relationship adjustment. The instruments were contextualized for Filipino multigrade classrooms and were subjected to expert validation and pilot testing before actual administration. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 5 (Always Observed) to 1 (Never Observed). Necessary permissions were secured from the appropriate Department of Education authorities and school administrators before data collection. Informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, privacy, and secure handling of data were observed throughout the research process. Completed questionnaires were checked, coded, and organized for statistical analysis. The weighted mean was used to determine the levels of emotional boundaries and identity conflict. The Pearson Product-Moment

Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was used to examine the strength, direction, and statistical significance of the relationship between the two variables, provided that the assumptions for Pearson correlation were satisfied.

Results

Table 1. Level of pupils' emotional boundaries as perceived by their teachers in terms of self-regulation

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	The pupil remains calm even when corrected by the teacher.	4.38	0.52	Very High
2	The pupil can manage frustration when faced with difficult tasks.	4.00	0.46	High
3	The pupil continues working even after making mistakes.	4.12	0.46	High
4	The pupil waits for instructions rather than acting impulsively.	4.12	0.53	High
5	The pupil handles teasing or disagreements without aggression.	3.94	0.44	High
6	The pupil shows control in emotionally charged situations.	4.05	0.42	High
	Aggregate Mean	4.10		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.47	High

Table 1 presents the level of pupils' emotional boundaries as perceived by their teachers in terms of self-regulation. The results showed an aggregate weighted mean of 4.10, with an aggregate standard deviation of 0.47, verbally described as High. Among the indicators, remaining calm even when corrected by the teacher obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.38 ($SD = 0.52$), interpreted as Very High. This indicated that pupils generally responded calmly to teacher correction and were able to control their immediate emotional reactions. This was followed by continuing to work after making mistakes and waiting for instructions rather than acting impulsively, both with weighted means of 4.12 and interpreted as High. Pupils also demonstrated a high level of control in emotionally charged situations ($WM = 4.05$), while managing frustration during difficult tasks obtained a weighted mean of 4.00.

The lowest-rated indicator was handling teasing or disagreements without aggression, with a weighted mean of 3.94 ($SD = 0.44$), although it was still interpreted as High. This suggested that pupils generally demonstrated appropriate self-regulation but experienced comparatively greater difficulty managing their reactions during interpersonal conflicts. Overall, the findings indicated that pupils possessed a high level of self-regulation, demonstrating the capacity to manage frustration, control impulsive behavior, persist after mistakes, and regulate

emotional responses. The relatively low aggregate standard deviation of 0.47 also indicated that teachers' ratings were generally consistent. The findings implied that pupils had developed positive emotional control necessary for functioning in multigrade classrooms, although additional guidance in managing teasing, disagreements, and peer conflicts could further strengthen their self-regulatory abilities.

Table 2. Level of pupils' emotional boundaries as perceived by their teachers in terms of empathy

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	The pupil notices when a classmate feels sad or upset.	4.29	0.61	Very High
2	The pupil offers help or comfort to peers in need.	4.08	0.45	High
3	The pupil celebrates classmates' achievements without jealousy.	4.08	0.50	High
4	The pupil listens attentively when others share experiences.	4.05	0.53	High
5	The pupil apologizes when causing harm or inconvenience to others.	4.13	0.47	High
6	The pupil respects classmates' feelings even when disagreeing.	4.08	0.39	High
	Aggregate Mean	4.12		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.49	High

Table 2 presents the level of pupils' emotional boundaries as perceived by their teachers in terms of empathy. The findings revealed an aggregate weighted mean of 4.12 and an aggregate standard deviation of 0.49, verbally described as High. The highest-rated indicator was the pupils' ability to notice when a classmate felt sad or upset, with a weighted mean of 4.29 (SD = 0.61), interpreted as Very High. This indicated that pupils were highly aware of the emotional conditions of their classmates. The ability to apologize after causing harm or inconvenience followed with a weighted mean of 4.13 (SD = 0.47). Offering help or comfort to peers, celebrating classmates' achievements without jealousy, and respecting classmates' feelings despite disagreements each obtained a weighted mean of 4.08, all interpreted as High.

The lowest-rated indicator was listening attentively when others shared their experiences, with a weighted mean of 4.05 (SD = 0.53), although it remained within the High level. Overall, the results indicated that pupils demonstrated a high level of empathy in their classroom interactions. They generally recognized others' emotions, responded supportively to peers, acknowledged their actions when they affected others, and showed respect for classmates' feelings. The aggregate standard deviation of 0.49 further suggested relatively consistent teacher

observations across the indicators. The findings implied that pupils possessed positive socio-emotional skills that supported harmonious relationships in the multigrade classroom. However, continued activities that develop attentive listening, perspective-taking, cooperation, and sensitivity to peers' experiences could further strengthen pupils' empathy and contribute to more supportive interactions among learners of different ages and grade levels.

Table 3. Level of pupils' emotional boundaries as perceived by their teachers in terms of respectful turn-taking

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	The pupil takes turns and waits patiently during group activities.	4.09	0.51	High
2	The pupil shares learning materials willingly with classmates.	4.00	0.53	High
3	The pupil respects speaking turns during discussions.	4.32	0.59	Very High
4	The pupil follows classroom routines for order and fairness.	4.05	0.42	High
5	The pupil cooperates in pair/group tasks without dominating.	4.05	0.39	High
6	The pupil allows others to express ideas even when opinions differ.	3.91	0.56	High
	Aggregate Mean	4.07		High
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.50	

Table 3 presents the level of pupils' emotional boundaries as perceived by their teachers in terms of respectful turn-taking. The findings showed an aggregate weighted mean of 4.07 and an aggregate standard deviation of 0.50, verbally described as High. The highest-rated indicator was respecting speaking turns during discussions, with a weighted mean of 4.32 (SD = 0.59), interpreted as Very High. This indicated that pupils generally demonstrated strong respect for established speaking turns during classroom discussions. Taking turns and waiting patiently during group activities followed with a weighted mean of 4.09 (SD = 0.51). Following classroom routines for order and fairness and cooperating in pair or group tasks without dominating both obtained a weighted mean of 4.05, while willingly sharing learning materials received a weighted mean of 4.00. All these indicators were interpreted as High.

The lowest-rated indicator was allowing others to express ideas even when opinions differed, with a weighted mean of 3.91 (SD = 0.56), although it was still interpreted as High. Overall, the findings indicated that pupils demonstrated a high level of respectful turn-taking, suggesting that they generally observed classroom rules related to waiting, sharing, cooperation, and orderly participation. The aggregate standard deviation of 0.50 also indicated relatively consistent teacher perceptions of pupils' behavior. The findings implied that pupils had developed

positive interpersonal behaviors that supported orderly and cooperative interactions in multigrade classrooms. However, the comparatively lower rating for accepting differing opinions suggested an area that could be further strengthened. Teachers may continue providing collaborative activities and guided discussions that encourage pupils to listen respectfully, recognize different perspectives, share resources, and provide classmates with equal opportunities to participate.

Table 4. Level of pupils' identity conflict as perceived by the teachers in terms of sense of belonging

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	The pupil expresses pride in being part of the class regardless of grade level.	4.06	0.37	High
2	The pupil interacts comfortably with both younger and older peers.	4.09	0.37	High
3	The pupil feels accepted and valued by classmates of different grades.	4.10	0.47	High
4	The pupil participates actively in activities involving all grade levels.	4.04	0.50	High
5	The pupil identifies positively with the multigrade classroom community.	4.05	0.36	High
	Aggregate Mean	4.07		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.41	High

Table 4 presents the level of pupils' identity conflict as perceived by teachers in terms of sense of belonging. The findings revealed an aggregate weighted mean of 4.07 and an aggregate standard deviation of 0.41, verbally described as High. The highest-rated indicator was feeling accepted and valued by classmates of different grade levels, with a weighted mean of 4.10 (SD = 0.47). This was followed by interacting comfortably with both younger and older peers, which obtained a weighted mean of 4.09 (SD = 0.37). Expressing pride in being part of the class regardless of grade level obtained 4.06, while positively identifying with the multigrade classroom community received 4.05. These results indicated that pupils generally experienced positive acceptance and connection within the multigrade classroom.

The lowest-rated indicator was active participation in activities involving all grade levels, with a weighted mean of 4.04 (SD = 0.50), although it was still interpreted as High. Overall, the findings indicated a high level of sense of belonging among the pupils. The relatively low aggregate standard deviation of 0.41 further suggested

that teachers' observations were generally consistent. The results implied that pupils were comfortable interacting across grade levels and generally perceived themselves as accepted members of the multigrade classroom community. Thus, the findings suggest less difficulty in this aspect of identity conflict, while opportunities for mixed-grade participation could still be strengthened to reinforce pupils' inclusion, acceptance, and connection with the classroom community.

Table 5. Level of pupils' identity conflict as perceived by the teachers in terms of role and status clarity

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	The pupil understands his/her role as a learner regardless of age or grade.	4.14	0.42	High
2	The pupil accepts guidance from older classmates respectfully.	4.01	0.47	High
3	The pupil provides help to younger classmates when needed.	4.03	0.53	High
4	The pupil displays confidence appropriate to his/her grade level.	3.97	0.48	High
5	The pupil avoids showing superiority or inferiority toward other grade levels.	4.04	0.44	High
	Aggregate Mean	4.04		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.47	High

Table 5 presents the level of pupils' identity conflict as perceived by teachers in terms of role and status clarity. The findings showed an aggregate weighted mean of 4.04 and an aggregate standard deviation of 0.47, verbally described as High. The highest-rated indicator was understanding one's role as a learner regardless of age or grade, with a weighted mean of 4.14 (SD = 0.42). This indicated that pupils generally understood their responsibilities and position as learners within the multigrade classroom. This was followed by avoiding displays of superiority or inferiority toward pupils from other grade levels, with a weighted mean of 4.04 (SD = 0.44), and providing help to younger classmates when needed, with 4.03 (SD = 0.53). Accepting guidance from older classmates obtained a weighted mean of 4.01 (SD = 0.47).

The lowest-rated indicator was displaying confidence appropriate to one's grade level, with a weighted mean of 3.97 (SD = 0.48), although it remained within the High category. Overall, the results indicated that pupils demonstrated a high level of role and status clarity within the multigrade classroom. The aggregate standard deviation of 0.47 suggested relatively consistent teacher perceptions. The findings implied that pupils generally understood their roles, appropriately interacted with younger and older classmates, and maintained positive perceptions of their status across grade levels. However, pupils' grade-level confidence could still be

strengthened through activities that provide age-appropriate responsibilities, leadership opportunities, and recognition. Since the indicators were positively worded, the high scores reflected strong role and status clarity and, consequently, fewer indications of identity conflict in this dimension.

Table 6. Level of pupils' identity conflict as perceived by the teachers in terms of peer relationship adjustment

S/ N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	The pupil easily forms friendships across grade levels.	4.10	0.35	High
2	The pupil collaborates well with peers of varying ages in classroom tasks.	4.04	0.34	High
3	The pupil respects the ideas of younger or older classmates.	4.13	0.47	High
4	The pupil manages conflicts calmly and fairly across age differences.	3.99	0.34	High
5	The pupil shows comfort working with any classmate regardless of grade.	4.05	0.42	High
	Aggregate Mean	4.06		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.38	High

Table 6 presents the level of pupils' identity conflict as perceived by teachers in terms of peer relationship adjustment. The findings revealed an aggregate weighted mean of 4.06 and an aggregate standard deviation of 0.38, verbally described as High. The highest-rated indicator was respecting the ideas of younger or older classmates, with a weighted mean of 4.13 (SD = 0.47). This indicated that pupils generally demonstrated respect for different perspectives despite differences in age or grade level. This was followed by easily forming friendships across grade levels, with a weighted mean of 4.10 (SD = 0.35). Pupils also showed comfort working with any classmate regardless of grade (WM = 4.05) and collaborated well with peers of varying ages during classroom tasks (WM = 4.04), with both indicators interpreted as High.

The lowest-rated indicator was managing conflicts calmly and fairly across age differences, with a weighted mean of 3.99 (SD = 0.34), although it remained within the High category. Overall, the findings indicated that pupils demonstrated a high level of peer relationship adjustment in the multigrade classroom. The relatively low aggregate standard deviation of 0.38 suggested that teachers' observations were generally consistent. The results implied that pupils were able to establish friendships, cooperate, respect different ideas, and work comfortably with classmates from different grade levels. However, conflict management emerged as a comparatively weaker area and may require continued guidance through cooperative activities, peer mediation, and appropriate conflict-resolution strategies. Since the indicators were positively stated, the high scores reflected

positive peer adjustment and fewer indications of identity conflict rather than a high degree of identity-related difficulty.

Table 7. Test of significance of the relationship between the pupils' emotional boundaries and their identity conflict

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Emotional Boundaries and Identity Conflict	0.442*	Weak Positive	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Table 7 presents the test of significance of the relationship between pupils' emotional boundaries and identity conflict as perceived by their teachers. The analysis yielded an r-value of 0.442, indicating a weak positive correlation based on the classification used in the study. The p-value was reported as 0.000, which is below the 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that a statistically significant relationship existed between pupils' emotional boundaries and identity conflict. For formal statistical reporting, the p-value is more appropriately presented as $p < .001$ rather than $p = .000$. The positive correlation indicated that higher emotional-boundary scores tended to be associated with higher scores on the identity-related dimensions measured in the study.

Discussion

The findings revealed that pupils demonstrated a high level of emotional boundaries across self-regulation, empathy, and respectful turn-taking. Teachers generally observed that pupils were capable of managing their emotions, responding appropriately to correction, showing concern for classmates, cooperating with others, and observing appropriate turns during classroom interactions. Among the specific behaviors, pupils showed particularly positive responses in remaining calm when corrected, recognizing when classmates were sad or upset, and respecting speaking turns during discussions. However, comparatively lower ratings were observed in handling teasing or disagreements without aggression, listening attentively to others' experiences, and allowing classmates to express differing opinions. These findings indicated that pupils generally possessed well-developed emotional and interpersonal skills necessary for functioning effectively in multigrade classrooms, although continued support in conflict management, attentive listening, and acceptance of differing perspectives could further strengthen their emotional boundaries.

The findings also showed high levels of sense of belonging, role and status clarity, and peer relationship adjustment. Since these indicators were positively worded,

the high scores reflected positive identity adjustment and fewer manifestations of identity conflict. Pupils generally felt accepted across grade levels, understood their roles as learners, established friendships with younger and older classmates, and demonstrated respect during mixed-grade interactions. Furthermore, a statistically significant positive relationship was found between emotional boundaries and the identity-related measures ($r = .442, p < .001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicated that pupils with stronger self-regulation, empathy, and respectful turn-taking also tended to demonstrate stronger belonging, clearer roles and status, and better peer adjustment. The findings therefore highlighted the importance of strengthening pupils' social-emotional competencies and maintaining supportive mixed-grade interactions to promote positive adjustment within multigrade classrooms.

Conclusion

The study concluded that multigrade pupils demonstrated high emotional boundaries in self-regulation, empathy, and respectful turn-taking. They also exhibited strong belonging, role and status clarity, and peer relationship adjustment, indicating fewer manifestations of identity conflict. Moreover, a significant positive relationship existed between emotional boundaries and identity-related adjustment. Thus, pupils with stronger emotional competencies tended to demonstrate better social and identity adjustment. These findings emphasized the importance of strengthening emotional skills and positive interactions within multigrade classroom environments for learners.

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