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Thanks to the IRIS Area and International Studies Award for Incoming Graduate Students, I was able to travel to the Peruvian Amazon to collect data for my pilot project, a requirement of my Ph.D. program in Education Policy Studies. My pilot project focuses on school leadership in multi-grade schools in Peru. School leadership is a key factor to achieve educational quality. There is a vast body of evidence that shows that effective school leadership has a positive impact on student achievement, and there is a consensus among scholars that leaders in schools should focus on pedagogical work, prioritizing activities related to the improvement of classroom instruction (Halverson & Kelley, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008; Robinson & Hargreaves, 2011). However, traditional leadership cannot be implemented in many contexts because of different school organizational structures or lack of resources. This is the case of multi-grade schools in the Global South. For that reason, this qualitative case study seeks to understand how teachers in multi-grade schools in Peru understand and implement school leadership practices, and what are the main barriers and facilitating factors in this implementation. This will help in the generation of evidence that will allow the development of a new set of leadership practices that are relevant to multi-grade schools, especially in the Global South.

I spent a month in Ucayali, a Peruvian region located in the Amazon where 21,052 out of the 102,406 students enrolled in elementary school in the region attend a multi-grade school (Miranda, 2020, MINEDU, 2020). Ucayali, like most Amazon regions in Peru, has scored low on students' achievement tests for many years, with only 15.9% of students scoring at grade level in math in 2018 (MINEDU, 2019). In terms of language diversity, in Ucayali, there are 20 languages spoken, out of the 48 languages present in Peru. I collected data in 5 multi-grade schools through interviews with 16 teachers, observations of 16 classes, and observations of formal and informal teacher meetings. These schools were located in remote areas and some of them were in indigenous communities. This work allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of school leadership in multi-grade schools, which is something that is missing in the current literature on education policy.

The data collected thanks to the IRIS Award will help expand our understanding of school leadership by building upon existing theories and frameworks and exploring their applicability in rural multi-grade school settings. The study also aims to inform policy and practice in rural multi-grade schools. By identifying the main barriers and facilitating factors for the implementation of school leadership, policymakers can use this information to prioritize the allocation of resources and develop policies that take into consideration the specific context of these schools. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the improvement of education in rural areas, particularly in the Global South, by providing insights into how school leadership can be effectively implemented and supported in multi-grade school settings.