

Multigrade teaching in primary grades in rural schools

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Multigrade teaching is defined as teaching to more than one grade simultaneously by a single teacher during a given timetabled period. Prevalence of multigrade teaching in Sri Lanka has not been recognised by educational policy. This study focused on identifying the needs of multigrade settings through condensed fieldwork and multiple case study approaches in an education zone with an estimated high prevalence.

The need for multigrade teaching is felt mostly by rural Type 3 schools due to non-entitlement of a teacher/ per grade, teacher deployment disparities, and teacher absenteeism. The majority of multigrade teaching schools were located in remote locations. According to principals and teachers of the 38 sample schools, the support and supervision by the education officers were at a minimum.

The prevalence of two-grade consecutive combinations was the most prevalent grade combination. Teachers although were responsible for multigrade classes, did not identify themselves as multigrade teachers. Teachers though trained through various modes of teacher education courses offered by the system were unable to address the demands presented by multigrade classes.

The main strategy adopted for multigrade teaching was to instruct each grade separately one grade after another, which is known as 'quasi-monograde' teaching. However, this approach did not meet the demands of the curriculum and the time incurred for teacher guided learning was low. Students idled for most of the school time. Students and teachers were demoralised and their absenteeism was high. The study points out that there is a grave need for focusing teacher education and curriculum development on the demands presented by the multigrade settings.

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