

Planning and Policy Models for Multigrade Teaching Techniques in Nigerian Schools

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Abstract

Multigrade teaching technique is one of the means of achieving universalization of education as proposed by The World Education Conferences held in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, the Education For All (EFA) goals of 2000 and Dakar Framework of Action(2001). In the paper, the efforts of the Federal government of Nigeria at meeting the EFA and FFA goals are highlighted. Two models, 'Multigrade Teaching Model' and 'Combination Models' are developed in the paper. The paper further highlights the operation of multigrade classes and the problems facing multigrade teaching in Nigeria. Finally, the paper examines the planning and policy measures that can improve multigrade teaching techniques in Nigerian schools.

Keywords: Multigrade teaching; Planning; Policy; Model; Techniques; Nigerian Schools; Universalization

Introduction

All over the world, almost every sector is increasingly becoming more and more complex as a result of the increase in the perception and awareness of the people, which consequently propels them to quickly respond to changes in societal events (Adepaju, 2004). Nigeria is not an exception in this scenario. For instance, as Nigerian society becomes more and more complex, there is a gradual increase in the awareness of people that yesterday's approaches do not effectively solve contemporary problems of the Nigerian society any longer. This implies that innovations are needed in nearly all facets of the society. This awareness does not exclude Nigerian educational institutions. In order to meet up with the yearnings and expectations of Nigerian society and that of the international standards, there is the need to create more access to educational opportunities at the lower level in Nigeria. This can be realized through multigrade teaching techniques.

Wolff & Gracia (2000) and Cohen (2002) refer to multigrade class as 'a class where two or more different grade levels learn in one classroom with one teacher'. This often happens when pupil enrolments are low, but can also be done to improve children's learning. As in every class, each child in a multigrade class is different and will learn and develop at different levels.

A multigrade classroom is also a natural learning environment just like life in the village. In villages, children belong to a variety of groups that consist of children of different ages. Within families, friendship, church and other groups, younger and older children play, discover, learn and work together.

The use of multi-grade teaching methods provides a flexible way to meet the needs, interest and the levels of the development of each child. A child's development is assessed across a few years focusing on the social, emotional and gross motor, cognitive and intellectual development (Forbush & Morgan, 2004). Equality of educational opportunity is conceived as not only providing access to education but also creating conditions of success for the millions of learners living in remote, sparsely populated mountain regions, deserts, islands, lagoons, plains and other inaccessible areas. Efforts to provide comprehensive access to elementary education led to the establishment of a large number of primary schools with low enrolments where normal teacher: pupil ratio norms are just not operative and the number of teachers is less than the number of grades.

More specifically, multigrade teaching has the following objectives;

- ...**creation of access to education for all children**
- ...**bring school closer to communities**
- ...**overcome a shortage of teachers**
- ...**modernize teaching methods**
- ...**reduce drop-out and repeater rates**
- ...**increase the participation and literacy rates.**

Multi-grade Teaching, (2003, April 20).

Considering the problems being faced in meeting the goals of EFA and FFA in terms of providing equal educational opportunities to Nigerian child in rural areas, this paper attempts at developing planning and policy measures that could be evolved to improve multigrade teaching techniques in Nigerian schools so as to create more access to basic education for those in difficult terrains notwithstanding the shortage of teachers, classrooms and other learning materials being experienced in schools.

Efforts of Nigerian Government at Meeting EFA and FFA Goals

The Education for All (EFA) goals of 2000 and Dakar Framework of Action of 2001 have implications for universalization of education and educational accessibility in Nigeria while multigrade system is an implementation strategy towards achieving the EFA and FFA Educational Goals which emphasizes increase access to education provision at the first level of formal education. Following the adoption of the EFA and FFA goals by countries all over the world, Nigeria has restructured her educational system by introducing the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program which allows a child to stay in school for 9 years (Primary I through Junior Secondary III) to complete the basic education level.

In the budget proposal presented to the Joint Session of the National Assembly by the former Nigerian President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on Wednesday 11th of October, 2006 reaffirmed the plan of the Federal Government of Nigeria to meet the EFA and FFA goals. Chief Obasanjo remarks further:

"...work is presently ongoing on the revision of school curricula at all levels to improve the quality, relevance and practicality of education... Before the end of this month, we will have stakeholders' forum

on education to redirect our educational policy and ensure value for money. We must realistically face the following issues: education for all, education for what; quality of education; paying for education and product of education" (p. 5).

As at 31st August 2006, Federal Government had released N15.2 billion of the N30.5 billion appropriated for the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) for the provision of grants to states and Local Governments to help support basic education. These grants according to Federal government are being applied to upgrade facilities, train and re-train primary school teachers and fund the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) for primary school pupils.

The budget estimate for education in the 2007 amounted to N186 billion up from N166 billion in 2006 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2007). The bulk of the allocation is targeted at human resource capacity building up grading of facilities in our educational institutions and bold new reforms to improve the quality of and access to education. This is also in line with EFA and FFA goals.

Multigrade Teaching in Nigeria

In rural areas and mostly in difficult terrains in Nigeria, schools are small and population of pupils is usually very low. The total number of pupils in some rural schools across primary grades 1 to 6 ranges from 5 to 10. There are therefore short ages of teachers to handle the classes or grades. The practice is that a teacher is assigned to work with small groups of children of different grade levels in the same classroom. In these situations, the teacher is required to use multigrade teaching approaches. Small multigrade schools serve areas that are thinly populated. In remote rural areas, they also help to create education opportunities for girls by bringing schools closer to the home and meet the needs of children in nomadic communities. These schools are a crucial part of the drive to attain the goals of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme, an offshoot of EFA and FFA, which the government and people of Nigeria have committed themselves to.

In 2000, the UBEC with the support of the World Bank conducted action research activities on multigrade teaching techniques in Nigeria. hitherto, not much was known about multi-grade schools and classrooms in Nigeria because educational problems were seen from only one narrow perspective of monograde schooling (UBEC / World Bank, 2004). Even though, small schools with fewer enrolments, teachers and classrooms abound mostly in remote rural areas in many states of the federation, not much attention was paid to how learning was organized in those schools.

The results showed that multigrade classes are in operation in the following states of the federation, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Plateau, Taraba, Cross Rivers, Rivers, Enugu, Niger, Delta, Kebbi, Ebonyi, Kwara, Jigawa, Yobe, Bayelsa, Imo, Edo, Anambra, Akwa-Ibom, Adamawa, Abia and Benue. This development therefore led to series of training programmes mounted for teachers to cope with the trend. Success stories were recorded thereafter.

Figure 1 : Multigrade Teaching Model (MTM)

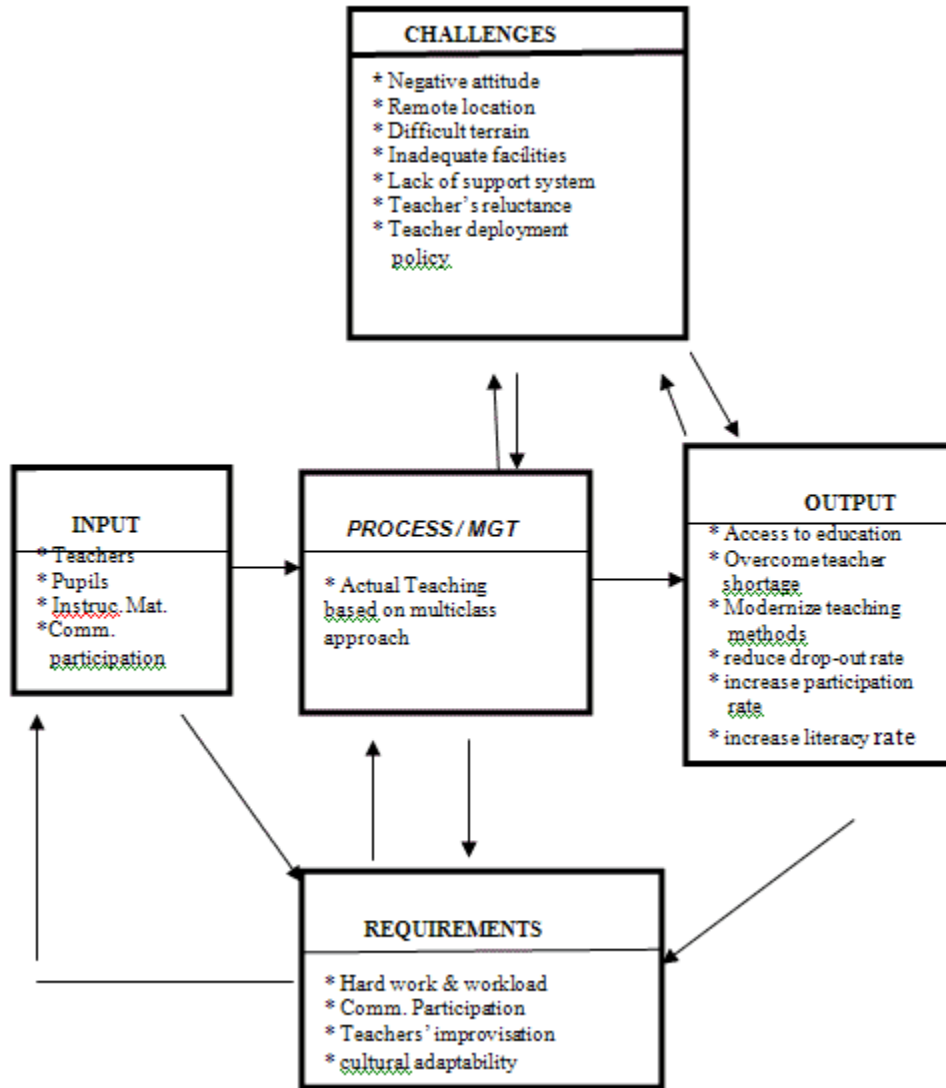


Figure 1 presents a model of multigrade teaching showing the inputs, process and output systems. Also from the model, the challenges posed by multigrade teaching as well as all the requirements to make MGT realistic are shown in the boxes. A single-edged liner reveals the direction to which information flows while double-edged lines reveal that there are interconnectivities between the variables in such boxes

Determination of Multiclass

The head teacher and multigrade teachers determine which of the grades or levels should be grouped together. Five basic variables can help in the identification of multi classes. These are;

- Population of pupils
- Population of teachers

- Level of training, competency and experience of teachers.
- Adequacy and quality of instructional materials
- Functional classroom

Figure 2: Combination Models

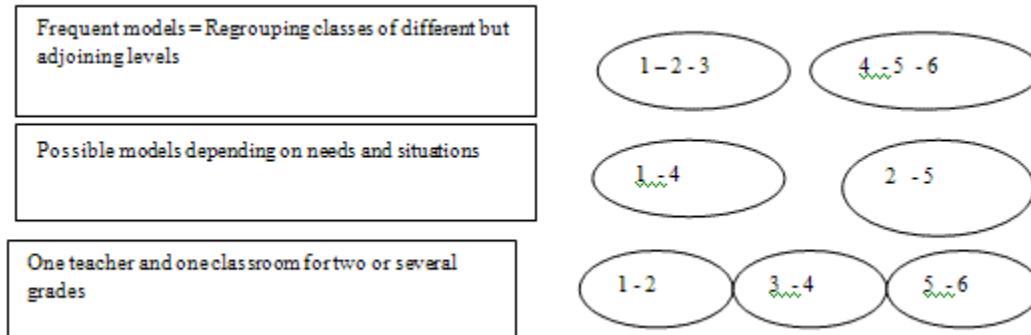


Figure 2 characterizes flexibility and responsiveness to different situations.

Problems Militating against Effective Practice of Multigrade Teaching in Nigeria

The following are the observed problems militating against effective practice of multigrade teaching in Nigeria

- Remote location (difficult terrain) of communities that need multigrade teaching
- Teachers do refuse posting to multigrade schools for lack of basic amenities and difficult terrain and confidence arising from lack of training in multigrade teaching
- Sometimes, teachers prefer to live outside the communities and come to school late or irregularly
- Negative attitudes to multigrade teaching
- Lack of flexibility in curriculum and time tabling
- Inadequate infrastructure and lack of instructional materials
- Lack of policy on multigrade teaching and small schools
- General lack of knowledge about multigrade teaching even in teacher education institutions
- Lack of support systems for multigrade teachers, whether pre-service or in-service

Emphasizing the problems of multigrade teaching in developing countries, (Beneviste and McEwan, 2000) mentioned four potential factors which include lack of faith in multigrade pedagogy, professional and social isolation, difficulties of teaching in a multigrade classroom, and 'ownership' of multigrade teaching. Each of these factors has implications for the development of multigrade teaching programmes in developing countries.

Planning and Policy Implications for Improving Multigrade Teaching Techniques in Nigerian Schools and Colleges.

The following are the planning and policy measures that could be evolved to improve multigrade teaching techniques in Nigerian Schools.

- Sensitization of stakeholders on multigrade teaching particularly, teacher training institutions and commissions and / or institutes such NCCE, NTI and UBEC to raise awareness and correct negative attitudes
- Mobilization of communities to support multigrade schools
- Make schools child-and teacher-friendly
- Provision of adequate instructional materials and infrastructure
- Recruitment of teachers from the school communities
- Policy statements on small schools and multigrade teaching incentive for multigrade teachers
- Opportunities to observe and learn from models of good practice from other countries
- Professional support for multigrade teachers through in-service training and appropriate materials for multigrade teachers
- Inclusion of MGT in pre-service training of primary and secondary school teachers

According to Miller (1991), the following suggestions are posited for improving and strengthening multigrade teaching in Nigeria.

1. Clear-cut policies on:
 - maximum and minimum enrolment in multi-grade classes
 - assignment of school head teachers /principals and teachers to manage and organize grade classes.
2. In-service training programs on national, regional, divisional levels for teachers, school administrators and supervisors of multi-grade classes, with emphasis on:
 - programming of class activities and budgeting of time
 - grouping children for instruction
 - curriculum implementation
 - preparation of instructional materials
 - classroom management
3. Priority given to multigrade classes in the distribution of instructional materials and supplies
4. Priority given to schools with multigrade classes in the distribution of extension positions and school buildings
5. Training programs in teacher education institutions included in multi-grade teaching
6. Incentives provided for teachers who have performed well as multi-grade teachers in form of:
 - merit increase in salary
 - out of station incentives
 - additional credits or points in the performance rating
 - special commendations and /or assistance
7. Multigrade teaching offered as a field of specialization in pre-service training of teachers and as a special course for non-qualified teachers handling such classes in remote/rural areas
8. Need to evolve national policy on multigrade teaching in the country.

Summary and Conclusion

Multigrade teaching approach is necessitated by the need to ensure that pupils in rural areas and difficult terrains are given access to education like their counterparts in urban setting in Nigeria. It is a strategy towards achieving the EFA and FFA educational goals. The efforts of the Federal Government of Nigeria at meeting these educational goals are highlighted in the paper. The paper examines the objectives of multigrade teaching and its operation in Nigeria. Two models 'Multigrade Teaching Model' and 'Combination Models' were developed in the paper. The models emphasise simple system approach to multigrade teaching technique and highlighting the challenges, requirements and class-grouping combinations respectively. The paper further highlights the problems facing multigrade teaching in Nigeria while some planning and policy measures that can improve the approach.

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