

## **Challenges Faced by Primary School Teachers in Schools with Multi-Grade Classes in Zimbabwe: A Case for Ten Primary Schools in Gutu District in Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the study was to investigate challenges faced by teachers in teaching multi-grade classes. The study focused on challenges emanating from time tabling of lessons, scheming, lesson planning, lesson delivery and records management in multi-grade classes. The study used the mixed methodology and the descriptive survey design. Ten school heads and thirty teachers were purposively selected. Data was collected through document analysis, structured questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and observations of the actual teaching of composite classes. Data was analysed based on themes that emerged from the responses and research questions. The study revealed that teachers are allocated to multi-grade classes where they are expected to scheme, plan, teach and manage records separately for each grade in the multi-grade class resulting in overstretching of the teacher's potentials. Multi-grade schools were found to be characterised by shortage of physical infrastructure, poor financial resource base and geographically spaced families such that teachers experience numerous challenges affecting their performance and ultimately the performance of the learner and the school. The other challenges observed were limited learning time for learners and work overloads on teachers. The study recommended for a review of the schools grading policy so that multi-grade schools are categorised as special learning zones with a special revolving fund towards financing teaching and learning processes.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Multi-grade class, Primary School, Teacher, Learners.

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### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Primary schools in Zimbabwe exist as formal learning institutions with a mandate of imparting basic knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to learners. These help them to become worthy-fitting members in society. The schools are classified as government schools, council schools, trust schools, farm schools, mine schools, church institutions and privately owned schools [1]. In all cases the schools have to be registered with the Ministry of Education. Before 2004 schools in Zimbabwe were also categorised as either grade one, grade two or grade three based on enrolment. Schools with the lowest enrolment belonged to the grade three category. The teaching load therefore heavily depends on the number of children enrolled at a particular school, population density in the catchment area and the enrolment norms as envisaged in the statutes of the government or responsible authorities as governed by legally constituted bodies of the School Development Associations (SDAs) and School Development Committees (SDCs).

The Civil Service Commission (CSC) is involved in the recruitment, selection and deployment

of qualified teachers to schools through staffing personnel at the ministry's head office, regional offices and district offices. Teachers graduating from training colleges are deployed to schools where regulations and statutory instruments prescribe uniform working conditions for teachers. Among other regulations, are regulations on conduct of teachers and teacher-pupil ratio which is 1:40 at primary school [2]. Such a regulatory standard did not augur well with primary schools of very low pupil enrolments. As such schools with low enrolments combine pupils of different age and grades into composite classes, under the auspices of one teacher. The teacher has the responsibility of scheming, planning, timetabling, teaching, marking of written work, carry out evaluations and assessments and manage records for the multi-grade classes. However, the concept of multi-grade teaching is cost-effective on the part of the government though teachers involved are overburdened. It is believed that when a teacher is delegated to too many teaching loads and responsibilities, his/her services are overstretched resulting in the overutilization of one's potential and ultimately a compromise to quality teaching and learning. This prompted the researchers to investigate

the extent to which teachers are utilised in their day-to-day teaching of multi-grade classes with an aim of improving the cost effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The provision of quality education in Zimbabwe witnessed a growing number of primary schools and supply of teachers and resource materials towards meeting education goals. The existence of small schools saw the allocation of a teacher to teach more than one grade combined into a composite class or multi-grade class. The teacher had the responsibility of scheming, lesson planning, lesson delivery and management of teaching and learning records. The statement of the problem can be expressed in question form: What are the challenges faced by multi-grade teachers?

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to assess the challenges faced by multi-grade class teachers.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the staffing criteria of allocating teachers to multi-grade classes.
- To evaluate how multi-grade teachers scheme, plan and deliver lessons to multi-grade classes.
- To assess how school heads are utilised in school administration and teaching.
- To evaluate how multi-grade teachers supervise children's written work and manage records in multi-grade classes.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following questions:

- What criteria are used by school heads to allocate teachers to multi-grade classes?
- How do multi-grade teachers scheme, plan and deliver lessons to multi-grade classes?
- How do multi-grade teachers supervise children's written work and manage records in multi-grade classes?
- How are school heads utilised in school administration and teaching of multi-grade classes?

### ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is based on the following assumptions:

- Teachers are allocated multi-grade classes.
- All grade levels in small schools are combined into multi-grade classes.
- Teachers at small schools have separate sets of records for grades into multi-grade classes.
- Teachers at small schools follow the individual grade lesson time table when teaching lessons to multi-grade classes.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is important to major stakeholders in the teaching and learning process since the findings would have far reaching effects to the existence of such schools with very low enrolments. The study will advocate for the abolition of multi-grade classes by the enactment of a separate regulatory framework on the reduced teacher-pupil ratio for such schools. This is important in the deployment of teachers to complement the existing grades creating a 'one grade to one teacher' scenario. It is also important to policy makers, educational planners, the government and responsible authorities as the findings will create a basis for informed decisions on effective teacher utilisation and the production of a transformed learner worth fitting in society.

### DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was confined to ten purposively selected former grade three primary schools in Gutu District, Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe. These include eight rural council primary schools, one farm school and one government satellite school. The respondents comprised ten school heads and thirty teachers. The study focused on the challenges faced by heads of schools and teachers in the teaching of multi-grade classes with particular interest on combination of grades, time tabling of lessons, scheming of work, lesson planning, lesson delivery and records management.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The time in which the study was carried out was so limited that the researcher could not cover all primary schools in Gutu District. Since the schools under study were geographically scattered, the researcher could not have full access to each respondent to administer questionnaires and conduct face-to-face interviews. Some questionnaires to distant schools were hand posted through heads of schools and were not returned. Even if the majority of respondents attempted all questions in the questionnaire, some open-ended questions were left unanswered and the use of face-to-face interviews helped to clarify issues.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Conceptual/Theoretical Perspectives: The Utilisation of Primary School Teachers in Zimbabwe

Before independence in 1980, the planning of education and teacher education in particular in Zimbabwe was based on racial policies. In order to address disparities in education a conventional teacher education programme had to be launched resulting in considerable expansion that broke barriers and other restrictions that existed during the colonial era [3]. At independence the education system in Zimbabwe inherited teachers with a variety of qualifications which included Primary Teachers Lower (PTL), Primary

Teachers Higher (PTH), T3 and T4 [4]. This was rationalised and all teachers colleges became associate colleges of the University of Zimbabwe and trainee teachers were awarded Diplomas in Education on completion of their courses. All teacher education colleges which train primary school teachers later adopted the 2-5-2 model of training teachers. The five represents the number of terms that trainee teachers have to spend on teaching practice. During their years of training they are attached to a mentor and a class. They change from one grade to another in the five terms they are out on teaching practice. In all the terms they are on teaching practice, trainee teachers do not teach multi-grade classes. The primary school curriculum in Zimbabwe comprises at least ten subject areas. Teachers are expected to scheme and plan all the subject areas.

When a teacher has served for a number of years through probation, he/she becomes eligible for promotion to Senior Teacher grade and can even be delegated to hold posts of higher responsibilities in school administration. This promotion is also determined by the teacher's level of competency at work and the ability to influence other teachers towards school effectiveness. The main thrust of promotion is to place people in positions where they can utilise their personal strengths and perhaps overcome their weaknesses by getting experience or training in those skills in which they need improvement [5].

Promotion of teachers to former grade three schools into headship becomes an additional administrative responsibility to classroom teaching. The teaching obligation of a head at such a primary school is influenced by very low pupil enrolment and ultimately low teacher establishment. Similarly, teachers at such a school are overstretched to cater for the existence of composite or multi-grade classes as determined by the teacher-pupil ratio of 1 teacher as to 40 pupils (1:40) as a national norm. The prevalence of very low enrolments at such schools automatically determines a combination of classes into one multi -grade class manned by a single teacher including the school head. The teaching skills deficit to professional training of teachers for multi-grade teaching and the staffing criteria of teachers remain issues of concern as schools constantly experience high staff turnover and poor pass rates. However, Gwarinda [6] brings the argument that, despite the existence of multi-grade classes, it is the task of the teacher to teach the individual learner the expected technical and social skills, attitudes and values that lead to child development.

#### **Staffing of Teachers at School Level**

The deployment of qualified teachers to schools is the responsibility of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's staffing officers at Head

Office, Regional Office and District Offices. Schools cannot recruit qualified teachers directly from colleges. Upon making projected pupil enrolments for the incoming academic year, the schools have to submit bids for vacant teaching posts to the District Office for onward transmission to the Human Resources Department at the Ministry's Head Office for planning on the number of teachers required per region, district and school. When teachers are deployed in schools it is the responsibility of the school head to collect information from the teachers for the purposes of allocating classes. As noted by Koontz and Wehrich [5] staffing in organisations is effected based on factors such as organisational goals, tasks to be accomplished, technological innovations, organisational structure and the demand for and supply of particular scarce skills personnel. In the case of schools, the rate of loss of teachers by resignation, death, transfer and discharge from service or promotion should be considered when making specifications for teachers required.

When new teachers are deployed in schools heads of schools must welcome and orient new entrants in the school system by addressing issues like school structure, code of conduct, accommodation and other physical infrastructure, school and community relations, school policy, social amenities and deployment of teachers to specific classes. Teachers must be made aware of the regulatory framework governing teaching and learning in primary schools and sign the Official Secrecy Act. When allocating teachers to classes, Musaazi [7] suggests that the head must consult each teacher as this is necessary to create a balance among the factors that affect the ultimate goal of class allocation. In the event of allocating teachers to multi-grade classes, the school head must allocate experienced teachers to multi-grade classes as it is the experience that is required to manage teaching and learning of children of varied age ranges and intellectual capabilities. When teachers of a lesser teaching experience are allocated to composite classes, contingency measures must be employed in the form of demonstration lessons and staff development workshops to instil competence and confidence in the handling of multi-grade classes. Teachers must be made aware of the conditions existing at the school otherwise the institution might experience staff turnover, student transfer/dropout and ultimately low quality service delivery.

The school head must carefully combine related grades into composite classes such that the teacher in charge is neither overstretched nor underutilised. A grade one class cannot be combined to a Grade Seven class because of a wide variance in the development and complexity of concepts even if the total multi-grade class enrolment concurs with the teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 as a national norm. This argument is also supported by Chivore [4] who suggests

that a grade one class where numeracy and literacy begin cannot be combined by any other grade in the primary school cycle. Instead a grade three class can be combined with a grade four class in consecutive order to create a multi-grade class under the auspices of one teacher. This system of staffing and class allocation will ultimately determine the modus operandi in lesson preparation for a multi-grade class.

### **Lesson Preparation for Multi-Grade Classes**

When primary school teachers are allocated to classes they are expected to prepare schemes of work as sources of lesson plans for all subjects in the primary school curriculum. It is from the official curriculum that schools promote such bodies of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills that are desirable in a particular cultural ideological environment. Thus, Lawton (1975:6) states that:

*The school curriculum is essentially a selection from the culture of society. Certain aspects of our way of life...are regarded as so important that their transmission to the next generation is not left to chance but is entrusted to specially trained professions (teachers) in elaborate and expensive institutions (schools).*

It is in these primary schools that qualified teachers are presented with the official curriculum in the form of specific subject syllabus documents that are developed by the government arm of the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU). The CDU has the responsibility of designing, modifying or redesigning the subject syllabi in order to enhance their effectiveness on meeting educational learning goals and objectives. Teachers are expected to use the syllabus and relevant textbooks for each grade to scheme and plan their work as they sequentially break down content into manageable units through prescribed formats as presented below: However, these formats vary considerably from school to school but the purposes portrayed are complementary. Whatever format is followed, it has to be noted that the role of scheming and planning remains paramount. As noted by Gwarinda [6] the scheme of work is the logical and sequential or step-by-step arrangement of subject matter to be taught and learned, drawn from the syllabus. The scheme is therefore a reflection of the teacher's interpretation of the syllabus.

The schemes of work and lesson plans are prepared being guided by the master timetable of the school that creates individual class time tables showing number of lessons per subject per day per week and the length of each lesson in minutes. In the case of primary schools in Zimbabwe, the official time allocated per lesson for an academic subject like Mathematics is 30 minutes and one hour for practical subjects like Home Economics for junior classes. Lessons for infant classes

have lesser time than juniors ranging from 15-20 minute sessions. The provision of less time for infant lessons is supported by Zindi, Peresuh and Mpofo [8] who stress the point that infants do not think and comprehend in the same way as juniors do. At the same time, infants have a low attention span. Their thought processes form different characteristics of maturation in cognitive development.

### **Lesson Delivery to Multi-grade Classes**

The purpose of teacher development is to prepare teachers to handle classroom situations through application of pedagogical skills, knowledge and competences required in the teaching and learning processes. Teaching is one such complex process which requires commitment to interact with the learner in a conducive learning environment. It is the teacher's responsibility to impart to the learner the expected technical and social skills, attitudes and values that enhance the total development of the child. This is further supported by Farrant [9] who argues that the primary obligation of the teaching profession is to guide children youths and adults in the pursuit of knowledge and skills, to prepare them in ways of democracy and to help them to become happy, useful and self-supporting citizens. The process of preparing and guiding learners places high demands on both the teacher and parents.

In terms of teaching loads, Hawes [10] argues that the time available in primary schools for the teaching of lessons is invariably less than time allocated in the national curriculum plans. The school day is loaded with various activities ranging from the school's social system demands to the expectations of the parent community and other stakeholders including government ministries, departments and the donor community. The fulfilment of their expectations is a deviation from the official teaching and learning time resulting in compromising the development of the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains. It is through this situation that the interference of the core-curriculum from the outside environment can be controlled so that learners are left with enough time to learn. Teachers are guided by the official timetable to teach planned lessons to each grade in the multi-grade class. By way of calculation, the minimum teaching load of a teacher per day per single grade is 8 lessons by 30 minutes excluding time allocated for co-curricular activities. Considering the minimum teaching load of a multi-grade class a teacher is expected to teach not less than 16 lessons by 30 minutes a day. This results in overstretching the teacher's capabilities who in the end views teaching and learning as a routine and not a commitment. Teachers may end up combining the teaching of subjects and ignore the prescriptions of the timetables. However, this creates chaos in trying to link teaching and learning activities to the lesson objectives of the grade that has covered the concept in the previous year. In addition, some subjects like Physical



Education, Art and Home Economics might not be taught as programmed due to the existence of a congested teaching and learning schedule and the lesser value attached to the subjects by the school and the community. On-the-spot remediation may be compromised during lesson delivery since the teacher is strained to catch up with the needs of the multi-grade class shifting from one grade to the other administering written work and on-the-spot marking that requires constructive commenting.

### **Records Management to Multi-grade Classes**

Primary school teachers have a set of official records that have to be attended to regularly since they provide diagnostic data that is relevant to the teacher, the child and the school authorities when need arises. These records include the Schemes of Work, Lesson plans, Attendance Register, Individual Progress Record Book, Remediation Record Book, Extension Record Book, Test Record Book and the Asset Register. The teacher is expected to input detailed information so that teaching and learning processes are enhanced. The existence of multi-grade teaching requires a fully prepared teacher to manage the records that ultimately reflect the truth in the system.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study dealt with the views and perceptions of school heads and teachers on the challenges experienced in the teaching and learning of pupils at schools characterised by multi-grade classes. The researcher employed the mixed methodology and the descriptive research designs. The descriptive survey research is employed to process data that is collected through observation, presented and analysed to make inferences. The survey carried out had to examine the utilisation of teachers in multi-grade classes and attach possible value to the processes undertaken.

### **Sample and sampling procedure**

The researchers used a sample of ten primary schools in Gutu District of Masvingo Province. The ten school heads and thirty teachers at the schools were the respondents in the study. The sample was purposively selected in terms of its accessibility and convenience to the researcher. According to Leedy [11], a sample is a subset of the population under study and should display all characteristics of the larger population from which it was selected. Thus, the sample representative of the population was large enough to allow the researcher to make valid generalisations.

### **Data collection methods**

Primary data was collected through observation, structured questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and document analysis. The data collection methods gave the respondents the opportunity to express themselves freely on how they are utilised in the teaching of multi-grade classes with special

reference to time-tabling, scheming, planning of lessons, lesson delivery and records management of each grade in the composite class. The collection of data through a variety of techniques was to allow complementation of responses as shortfalls of each method could easily be overcome by the strength of the other. Face-to-face interviews allowed the respondents to freely account for their experiences, feelings and thoughts allowing the researcher to probe beyond questionnaires and document analysis.

### **Data analysis procedures**

The research generated some qualitative and quantitative data which was presented and analysed to determine the validity and reliability of the study. The data collected through questionnaires, observations, face-to-face interviews and document analysis was analysed based on the responses from teachers and heads of schools about the major themes under study.

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

The data collected through observation, questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and document analysis was merged, presented and quantitatively analysed under sub-themes as discussed below:

### **Qualifications and Experience of Heads of Schools and Teachers at Grade Three Primary Schools**

The study revealed that seven (70%) heads of schools were males while three (30%) head were female. In terms of highest professional qualifications, five (50%) heads of schools had Bachelor of Education in Educational Management degree., and five (50%) heads had Certificate in Education Primary (CE). Data on the distribution of length of service of heads of schools revealed that all the ten (100%) school heads had teaching experience of more than ten years. Four (40%) were substantive heads by promotion and six (60%) were in an acting capacity. The long teaching experience on the part of school heads is an indication that each had the craft competency to implement the government's teaching and learning programmes with due diligence. However, the scenario that eight (50%) heads of schools did not have educational management qualifications did not augur well with an education system carefully designed to transform the learner into a value laden entity.

In terms of teacher distribution, twenty one (70%) were males while nine (30%) were females in the middle age range of 30- 49 years. Seven (23%) teachers had a teaching experience of 1-5 years while twenty three (77%) had a teaching experience of above six years. In terms of professional qualifications, all thirty (100%) teachers had Diplomas in Education (Primary). All the teachers were therefore trained in teaching at primary school level. Teacher development is a critical component in the quality matrix.

### **Staffing of teachers to multi-grade classes**

Data on the distribution of schools by pupil enrolment and teacher establishment was sought, presented and analysed. On pupil enrolment six (60%) had an enrolment in the range of 151-200 pupils while four (40%) schools were in the range of 101-150 pupils. This clearly shows that multi-grade classes are a characteristic of small communities with very meagre resources to fund the construction of classroom blocks and teachers houses. Observations made by the researcher during the study raised concern on one school practising double sessioning due to the non-availability of classrooms for the multi-grade classes. On staffing of teachers to multi-grade classes, schools with an enrolment of 101-151 pupils had two categories of the combination of grades. Category A had grade one and grade two combined into a multi-grade class, grade three and grade four, grade five and grade six, and grade seven was not combined to any grade as an examination class. The school head was in charge of grade seven in addition to administrative duties. Category B had grade one not combined to any grade while grades two and three, grades four and five, and grades six and seven were combined into multi-grade classes in that order. The school head was a female and in charge of grade one.

On schools with enrolments of 151-200 pupils and a staff establishment of five teachers each including a teaching head, three categories of grade combinations existed. Category A had grade one, grade six and grade seven as single classes while grades two and three, and grades four and five were combined into multi-grade classes respectively. The school head was teaching grade six. In Category B, the head was teaching grade five as a single class with grade six and grade seven not combined to any other grade. Grades one and two were combined while grades three and four were also combined into multi-grade classes in that order. Category C had grades one and two, grades four and five combined into multi-grade classes while grades three, six and seven were single classes. The school head was teaching grade three. The credibility of teaching either grade one or grade seven becomes questionable since the head is divorced from the teaching most of the times attending to administrative duties like attending staff meetings, supervision and any other duties. On the existence of grades combination into multi-grade classes all heads of schools indicated the need to consult the concerned teachers and even the School Development Committees (SDCs) and School Development Associations (SDAs) on the correct placement of teachers. Staff development workshops and demonstration lessons are regularly held in schools and clusters but the multi-grade systems approach requires separate treatment from other schools if ever educational goals are to be achieved. All teachers in the study also concurred to the idea of consultation on staffing matters but had a feeling that the deployment of

teachers to schools must be on a rotational basis while some feel there is need for a hardship allowance in order to improve on teacher retention and motivation.

### **Scheming and lesson preparation of multi-grade classes**

Data on scheming and lesson planning was presented analysed based on the varying practices in schools under study. Two (20%) school heads indicated that the teachers with multi-grade classes scheme and plan separately for each grade as guided by the Master timetable. Three (30%) heads of schools combine schemes of work into a single record while lesson plans are prepared separately according to the class time table. Five (50%) heads of schools adopted the school based Scheme-cum-plan of work in which teachers' effort is directed at lesson preparation on teaching and learning media rather than spend a lot of time preparing daily lesson plans. Evaluation of lessons taught is done in a separate evaluation book without necessarily interfering with the school based document which is controlled by the head as an official record just like the subject syllabus. Twenty teachers interviewed on the adoption of the school based scheme-cum-plan were very positive to the development and even suggested the implementation of staff development workshops at district or national level to make the development a policy issue. Teachers indicated that lesson plans on Mathematics, English and Shona were done separately while all content subjects like Environmental Science, Social Studies, Religious and Moral Education and Music are combined into one scheme and lesson plan though difficulties are encountered in trying to match lesson activities of learners at varying maturation stages.

### **Lesson delivery to multi-grade classes**

All the ten (100%) heads of schools indicated that teachers follow the time tables when teaching lessons to individual grades in the multi-grade classes as evidenced by the class visits to supervise lesson delivery. Heads of schools as government representatives indicated that official timetables are policy instruments and any deviation is an act of misconduct though they admitted the existence of a national problem in the teaching of multi-grade classes in small primary schools. However, all the thirty two (100%) teachers indicated that the time table is difficult to follow when teaching a multi-grade class. If one follows the prescriptions of the individual grade timetable then the teaching and learning of other subjects is compromised. Of interest is the attitudes of the school heads who teach single grades for fear of policy violation against teachers with multi-grade classes who are susceptible to committing acts of misconduct upon deviations. Teachers indicated that any deviations from the official multi-grade timetable should be viewed as innovations directed at effective teaching and learning in a multi-grade class. In terms of

content coverage not even one teacher indicated that the planned work was covered in a single day. In terms of lesson observations, all the thirty teachers indicated that they are regularly supervised with individual conferences for feedback being held between the teacher/supervisee and the head/supervisor. However, little or no staff feedbacks are held in the schools under study after supervisions are conducted. Lack of feedback negatively impacts on the professional growth of the teacher.

#### **Records management in multi-grade classes**

Data on the management of records was sought and presented as school heads and teachers agreed to having two sets of records for the two grades in the composite class. Information obtained during document analysis showed that heads of schools had detailed entries into their class records which were attended to regularly while records managed by teachers had information lagging behind in terms frequency and quality of purpose. Teachers indicated that most of the records are attended to during the night as teaching time to multi-grade classes did not give room to updating teaching and learning records. While marking of children's written work can be done during lessons, most teachers indicated that only work for the gifted children is attended to while written work for the slow learners is marked at night thereby compromising on-the-spot remediation and formative evaluation. Formative evaluation is ongoing and must be carried out during the teaching and learning process so as to determine corrective action where necessary.

Hawes [10] observes that formative evaluation is very important since it helps in modifying things as they are developing rather than wring your hands over them when they have failed. The shortage of time on record keeping by teachers is supported by seven (70%) heads of schools while three (30%) heads of schools agree that teachers attend to multi-grade class records regularly and on time. Such inconsistent practices in the keeping records raise questions on the validity of the information supplied in the records.

#### **Challenges in the Teaching of Multi-grade Classes**

The ten schools under study were making frantic efforts to implement government policy and programmes with diligence despite the challenges encountered in the teaching of multi-grade classes. One of the major challenges was the shortage of classrooms and furniture for the teachers and pupils. In some schools some teachers were sharing benches with learners as there was no teachers' furniture. Teachers' houses were scarce with teachers sharing the only one house available while the head commutes from his/her home as a local person. Most schools used old and broken furniture repaired by hiring cheap labour from the local community. All these problems are a result of poor or no funding from the government, local

authorities and the inability of the local community to raise and pay school levies.

The provision of teaching and learning materials in primary schools with multi-grade classes is a quantum leap horse as compared to resourcing of normal schools [12]. Due to limited financial resources schools only afforded to purchase teachers' resource books and nothing for the pupils. In some classes pupils were found sharing four textbooks with torn pages. This indicated lack of proper classroom/resource management skills on the part of the teachers and even the school head who could have initiated textbook binding. In terms of teachers' records, teachers were made to buy stationery resulting in lack of uniformity in records presentation. Parents were also expected to buy exercise books for the pupils as a way to involve them in the education of their children. However, the inabilities of some parents to comply left most learners idle with nothing to use. This even pushed the affected parents to absent their children and even withdraw pupils from learning. The Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) had failed to cover all learners in need.

Another challenge in the teaching of multi-grade classes was lack of clarity on the education policy governing the utilisation of teachers, and the teacher-pupil ratio for multi-grade classes. Responsible authorities including the government and major stakeholders in the education of children seem to be silent on the issue of multi-grade teaching.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The study came up with the following conclusions:

- Heads of primary schools with multi-grade classes are allocated to single grade teaching bearing in mind the headship responsibilities of school administration and management. This can also be attributed to a negative attitude towards multi-grade teaching by school heads. However, the existence of under qualified heads of schools in such complex systems and processes of teaching and learning is the major cause of the poor schools environment.
- Most schools under study do not have adequate facilities for use in the teaching and learning processes by both teachers and pupils. Learners were found competing for the scarce learning resources while teachers were purchasing materials from their meagre financial resources.
- Supervision of teachers is evident in all schools but the purpose of supervision is somewhat sketchy. Feedback on supervision is done on a one-on-one basis ignoring the need for an all stakeholder conference to improve on the effective and efficient multi-grade teaching.
- The combination of all primary school grades into multi-grades classes is evident in small schools

with some schools isolating Grade One and Grade Seven.

- Teachers do scheming and planning of work for each of the grade in the multi-grade class. In addition, teachers manage two sets of records for each component of the combined class. This can be a result of lack of carefully designed approaches and policy to multi-grade teaching on the part of the school head and the responsible ministries at large.
- Teachers have separate timetables for the two grades in the multi-grade class which they are obliged to follow. Though difficult to implement, teachers resort to combine the teaching of lessons to multi-grade classes. This is necessitated by lack of planning on the part of the administration.
- Both teachers and school heads are experiencing hardships in multi-grade teaching and these are working against the effective implementation of government policy.
- The multi-grade system has compromised the quality of education.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the conclusions indicated above, the study makes the following recommendations:

- There is need for the responsible ministries to deploy qualified school heads in multi-grade primary schools with a potential to turn around the fortunes of the learner through multi-grade teaching.
- The government and responsible authorities should create a revolving fund that is directed at cushioning such small schools from collapse in terms of resourcing and renovations of old structures or construction of new buildings.
- Staff development programmes must be planned and implemented to impart skills in teachers on the best approaches in multi-grade-teaching and learning.
- There is need for para-professional teachers who act as monitors to assist the teacher especially when the para- professional teacher is drawn from the local community.
- Parents can be utilised in the teaching and learning of children as community resource persons thereby creating closer relations and ownership towards school development.
- There is need for the government to revisit the policy on the classification of schools and consider multi-grade schools as special learning zones with unique characteristics different from normal primary schools and these require special treatment towards attainment of educational goals.

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