# AN INVESTIGATION OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING AT THREE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE KAVANGO REGION, NAMIBIA

by

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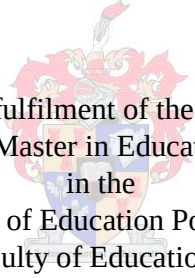

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# Declaration

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# Abstract

Multigrade teaching has been used in Namibia since the introduction of formal education; however, it became more prominent after independence, when the government proposed it to be the norm. Yet, regardless of its prevalence in rural schools – as high as 40% – qualified teachers are still not trained to teach multigrade classes. The primary aim of the research study therefore was to investigate multigrade teaching at three rural primary schools in the Ncuncuni circuit in the Kavango region. By employing a phenomenological methodology, the study explores the experiences and challenges as encountered in multigrade classrooms by six teachers. While a number of the challenges are common to experiences in typical monograde classrooms in Namibia – such as shortages of resources, poor parental involvement, and high rates of learner attrition – there are others that are specific to a multigrade setting. Given the growing number of multigrade schools in Namibia, particularly in rural settings, where infrastructure is already poor, the urgency for properly trained multigrade teachers can no longer be ignored. Among the key recommendations made by this study is that appropriate and sufficient teaching and learning materials, such as self-instructional and self-learning materials, should be provided to schools offering multigrade teaching. In acknowledging that the introduction of professional training will take time, and that the current teachers in multigrade classrooms are in dire need of support, the study would also like to recommend support from regional offices in the form of specialist advisers. There are numerous teachers in multigrade classrooms – many of whom will never receive any formal training. These teachers require immediate and on-going support if the Ministry of Education hopes to provide quality teaching and learning to learners.

**Keywords:** Multigrade teaching, multigrade classes, teaching and learning, professional training, re-imagined opportunities

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# Dedication

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| BETD | Basic Education Teacher Diploma |
| CEPD | Centre for Education Policy Development |
| DoE | Department of Education |
| EFA | Education For All |
| EMIS | Education Management Information Systems |
| ETP | Education Theory and Practice |
| MBESC | Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture. |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| MEC | Ministry of Education and Culture |
| MoE | Ministry of Education |
| NANTU | Namibia National Teachers Union |
| NIED | National Institute for Education Development |
| PED | Provincial Education Department |
| UNAM | University of Namibia |

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# Chapter 1

# Overview of the study

This chapter offers an introduction to the background context of and motivation for, as well as an overview of the research study, which investigates multigrade teaching in the Ncuncuni circuit in the Kavango region. The aspects of the research problem, research questions, research design, methodology and data construction methods also feature prominently in this chapter.

## 1.1 Motivation/rationale for the study

The study is motivated by my personal experiences as a teacher observing learners who were taught through multigrade teaching in rural schools. It became evident that these learners struggled with various subjects by the time they reached upper primary education, which is grades five to seven. Currently, research on the effectiveness of multigrade teaching in Namibian schools, and more specifically in the Kavango region, is non-existent. Not only are teachers not qualified for, or trained in multigrade teaching, but no attention is being given to what actually happens in a multigrade classroom. The importance of this research study, therefore, is firstly to gain insight into the experiences, challenges and opportunities (if any) of multigrade teaching in a rural setting, where there are very limited resources and support. Secondly, the study hopes to gain some understanding of the experiences of teachers who are trained in one field of specialisation and are equipped to teach a monograde class, but are expected to teach a multigrade class. To this end, the study hopes to make certain recommendations on how to address the prevalence of multigrade teaching in Namibian schools.

## 1.2 Background to the study

Schools in Namibia are divided into three main categories, namely primary, combined and secondary schools (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2008: 3). These schools are further divided

into seven phases: pre-primary schools, which include grade 0 (pre-primary) only; lower primary schools, from grade 1 up to grade 4; primary schools, from grades 0 to 7; upper primary schools, from grades 5 to 7; combined schools, from grades 0 to 10; junior secondary schools, from grades 8 to 10; and senior secondary schools, which comprise grades eleven and twelve (MoE, 2008: 3). In terms of physical structures the schools in Namibia can be classified into permanent and temporary structures. The permanent structures are classified into two groups: schools with, and schools without, hostels. The schools with hostels cater for grades 8 to 12, while the schools without hostels cater for grades 0 to 10. In other words, the majority of these schools are primary and combined schools. Schools based in temporary structures, which generally are found in remote and farm areas, are sub-divided into three groups. While some, called shelters, are constructed from poles, grass and muddy soil by the communities, other temporary structures are simply created under big trees where there is enough shade. As can be expected, these schools are usually disrupted and suspended when it rains. The third group of temporary structures consists of tents, which are predominantly found in the nomadic communities (MoE, 2011b: 25). These schools in tents are also called mobile schools because they are always on the move, located where communities are moving. While some multigrade schools are found in permanent structures, the majority are located in temporary structures. The Namibian government “strives to provide accessible, equitable, democratic and quality education for all, as well as to ensure learning opportunities are suited to learners' conditions so that they are best equipped to enter the formal education system” (Ministry of Education and Culture [MEC], 1993: 32). Despite this initiative by the Ministry of Education, there still are many challenges, most notably in the provision of quality education for learners, as well as the provision of teachers in remote areas. The staffing norms policy of 2001, signed in collaboration between the government and the Namibian National Teachers' Union (NANTU), has been in operation since 2003 in all state and privately subsidised schools in Namibia. In its attempt to equitably allocate teachers to schools, the policy requires a teacher-learner ratio of 1:35 in primary schools, 1:30 in combined and secondary schools, and 1:15 in special classes at mainstream schools (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture [MBESC], 2001: 1).

Since January 2003, with the full implementation of the staffing norms policy in all state and privately subsidised schools, the staffing norm of 2001 became the policy that regulates the allocation of teachers to these schools. The inspectors of education and school principals were instructed to monitor the full adherence to and implementation of this policy in all of these schools. The implementation of the staffing norms policy (MBESC-2001), however, has presented schools with many problems. For instance, it is difficult in rural areas to find thirty-five learners of the same grade or age. As a result, one teacher teaches thirty-five learners who are in different grades – leading to the construction of a multigrade class. In attempting to address the problem of providing teachers in remote areas, and in ensuring that all learners in these areas attend school, the Ministry of Education has implemented the practice of multigrade teaching. Multigrade teaching is a mode of teaching whereby one teacher teaches more than one grade in one classroom at the same time. Most of these schools are primary schools, offering classes from (pre-primary) grades zero to seven. Adding to the remoteness of these schools are the far distances between them – in some cases a minimum distance of ten to fifteen kilometres. The Ministry of Education (2011b: 8) asserts that these schools are characterised by insufficient facilities, such as classrooms and libraries, and the absence of physical structures, such as roads, electricity, telephones and clean water. Despite the poor conditions of these schools, they play a crucial role in providing education to learners and contribute to the reaching of the targets of education for all (MoE, 2011b: 8).

Namibia is divided into thirteen regions. The study was conducted in the Kavango region, which has a size of 48 742 $km^2$, with a population of 222 500 (National Planning Commission, 2012: 43). The region is further sub-divided into five traditional authorities, namely Hambukushu, Vagciriku, Vashambyu, Vambunza and Vakwangali. The Hambukushu traditional authority is in the far east of the region, bordering on the Republic of Botswana, while Vakwangali traditional authority is in the far west, bordering on the Vavambo traditional authority in the Ohangwena region. The Vagciriku, Vashambyu and Vambunza traditional authorities are situated between the Hambukushu and Vakwangali traditional authorities.

In terms of education administration, the region is divided into eleven circuit offices, 66 cluster centres, 222 cluster schools, 31 satellite schools, 319 schools, 276 principals, 101 heads of department, 2 733 teachers and 80 183 learners. The Ministry of Education (2011a: 14) states that the Kavango region has the highest number of schools (19%) in Namibia, with 183 schools offering multigrade teaching (MoE, 2011b: 12). The study was carried out in the Ncuncuni circuit in this region. This circuit has five cluster centres, twenty-five schools, one satellite school, 308 teachers and 10 516 learners. There are six urban schools and nineteen rural schools, covering a vast space of about 170 km, and twelve schools offer multigrade teaching.

The research study was conducted in three lower primary schools (grades 1 to 4), which I will refer to as schools A, B and C. All these schools offer education from grades 1 to 4 in rural areas with sparse populations. School A has sixty-four learners with two teachers; School B has fifty learners with two teachers, while school C has twenty-six learners with two teachers. Most of the teachers at the three schools hold a three-year Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD), specialising in lower primary education (grades 1 to 4) as monograde teachers.

According to the Education Act 16 of 2001(Republic of Namibia, 2001) school attendance is compulsory for every child from the beginning of the year in which the child attains the age of seven years. The learners in the three primary schools vary in age from seven to ten years old. Despite this age difference, these learners are in most cases likely to speak the same home language, called Rumanyo. This language is spoken mainly by people who live under the jurisdiction of Vagciriku and Vashambyu. This study was conducted in the jurisdiction of Vashambyu, where these schools are located. Most of these learners have the basic skill of looking after their parents' livestock.

The parents of these learners are mainly subsistence farmers who have livestock such as cattle, donkeys and goats, which they regard as important assets. According to the Kavango culture, a person with many livestock, such as cattle and goats, is regarded as a rich person. Most parents cultivate mahangu and maize in the summer session, with mahangu being regarded as the main

staple food of the Kavango people, while the maize is consumed mainly at harvest time. The cultivation of crops such as mahangu and maize is the main job done by the parents in the communities, with very few of them who are employed by government or private organisations. The parents are reluctant to be involved in the schools because they regard themselves as uneducated, therefore they are unsure how to contribute meaningfully to school development as they come from a dispensation where parents were not involved in the school matters of their children.

Despite this, some of the parents were actively involved in the school matters of their children in the following ways: they were involved in school meetings where important decisions are taken; in the construction of shelters that serve as classrooms, as indicated earlier; and some parents were also involved in the Namibian school feeding programme by preparing food for learners. This programme was jointly introduced by World Food Programme and the Namibian Government in 1992, just after independence (MoE, 2012: 5). The purpose of this programme is to provide one daily nutritious meal to orphans and vulnerable children at schools. A school feeding programme alone is not sufficient, however, although it has a positive impact on learners' school attendance.

## 1.3 The research problem

In 2003, the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture in Namibia implemented the Staffing Norms Policy (2001) for all schools in both urban and rural areas. One of the effects of the staffing norms policy is the practice of multigrade teaching in rural areas. Multigrade teaching has been in Namibia since the introduction of formal education, although it has become more prominent after independence, when the reformed government proposed it to be a norm (Ministry of Basic Education and Culture [MBEC], 1996: 27). While the government has given recognition to multigrade teaching, and while they are aware of the prevalence of multigrade schools, particularly in rural schools, teachers in Namibia are not trained to teach multigrade classes, as acknowledged by the Ministry of Education: 'The training for multigrade teachers was considered during the revision of Education Theory and Practice (ETP) course for Basic

Education Teacher Diploma' (MoE, 2011a: 13). To date this noble idea of training of multigrade teachers has not yet been put into practice.

Birch and Lally (in MoE, 2011a: 13) argue that, despite the large numbers of multigrade teachers in the country, most teachers are left alone to find their way in terms of delivering the learning content to more than one grade at the same time. In addition, it is observed that, while multigrade teachers are not trained, they gain experience through practice. The study therefore is based on the premise that, while teachers are trained as monograde teachers, they are not trained in multigrade teaching. Moreover, the study contends that the short workshops conducted by the staff members of National Institute for Education Development (NIED) are merely ad hoc interventions, and do not equip the multigrade teachers to carry out their professional duties effectively. Given the ever increasing number of multigrade classes in Namibia, and the dire need for children to receive adequate schooling, it is imperative for the Ministry of Education to reconsider the professional training of teachers so that they are trained and equipped for the multigrade classroom setting.

## 1.4 Main research question

In addressing the aforementioned problem, the study poses the following research question: What is the impact of multigrade teaching on teaching and learning at rural primary schools in Namibia? This question was addressed in relation to the following sub-questions:

1. What are the challenges facing teachers in a multigrade classroom?
2. What teaching strategies are adopted by teachers in a multigrade classroom?
3. How can or should teachers approach teaching and learning in a multigrade classroom?
4. What is necessary for the cultivation and support of effective multigrade schooling in a rural setting?

## 1.5 Research design

The research design is characterised by its qualitative, exploratory, contextual and descriptive nature. A qualitative approach was used in order to create a holistic picture of the phenomenon within the context it occurs (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 6). The study is an attempt to capture data on the impact of multigrade teaching on teaching and learning at three selected primary schools. The sample selection is non-random and purposeful. The criteria for selecting the schools are as follows: multigrade teaching, lower primary schools (grades 1 to 4), and that these schools should be in Ncuncuni circuit, Kavango region, Namibia.

## 1.6 Methodology

The study employed a phenomenological epistemology, in which the researcher observed, recorded and interpreted "lived experiences" through clear and detailed descriptions (Magrini, 2012: 1). According to Bromley (in Zucker, 2009: 1), phenomenology is a "systematic inquiry into [an] event or occurrence which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest". Phenomenology is the analysis of consciousness, the nature of essence as perceived in consciousness (Pence, 2000: 42). Waghid (2013: 7) explains phenomenology as a paradigm that deals with life experienced internally in our consciousness, the study of phenomena. In addition, phenomenology is concerned mainly with consciousness. This means that the participants are fully aware of the phenomenon. Furthermore, Waghid (2010: 6) argues that phenomenology deals with an attempt to set aside what we already know about something and describe how we can come to know it – a matter of tracing the processes by means of which we give meaning to the world. The study was conducted in three schools where multigrade teaching is the teaching mode and on the assumption that learners might not be well prepared during the teaching and learning because of multigrade teaching, in which the teachers were not trained. In addition, Magrini (2012: 1) argues that phenomenological study is determined by questioning the indispensable nature of lived experiences. In this context, the study investigated the phenomenon called multigrade teaching. Moreover, Babbie and Mouton (in De Vos, Strydom, Fouche &

Delport, 2011: 8) argue that this approach is called a phenomenological approach, because it aims to understand people and maintains that all human beings are engaged in the process of making sense of their worlds and continuously interpret, create, give meaning to, define, justify and rationalise their daily actions.

## 1.7 Data construction methods

Structured interviews were used to interview six teachers (two per school) at the selected schools. The interviews were conducted once, after I had spent some time at the school to obtain an understanding of the school environment and ethos, and had gained the trust of the teachers.

I equally employed classroom observation as one of the methods of data construction. I spent one week at each school, observing the teaching and learning in the multigrade classrooms. Classroom observations were done over two consecutive days in each class, observing the teaching of teachers who were not trained to teach multigrade classes.

## 1.8 Overview of the study

This study consists of five chapters.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the study, explaining the reason for conducting it.

Chapter 2 offers a literature review of the study. The literature presents various perspectives on multigrade teaching – both globally and locally.

Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology. It also includes the research methods: the research techniques adopted to construct data at the selected schools. The aspects of population and sampling for the study are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 offers a presentation and discussion of the findings. The chapter provides an understanding of what teachers are doing in multigrade schools. The opportunities and challenges of multigrade teaching, and the teaching strategies adopted by multigrade classes at the three selected schools, are presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the summary of the findings, the recommendations and conclusions. The chapter also points out possible topics for future research.

# Chapter 2

# Literature review

This chapter aims to explore the theoretical framework that serves as a lens to examine the impact of multigrade teaching on teaching and learning at rural primary schools. The chapter offers the literature from global to local perspectives. The literature reveals that multigrade teaching is a global phenomenon, yet the concept multigrade teaching is not globally used. The chapter attempts to look at multigrade teaching holistically, providing the answer of the main research question: what is the impact of multigrade teaching on teaching and learning?

The chapter is presented under the following key focus areas: understanding of multigrade teaching; benefits of multigrade classes; prevalence of multigrade teaching; rationale and opportunity for multigrade teaching; some of the challenges of multigrade teaching; classroom management techniques for multigrade teaching; language of learning and teaching in the multigrade classroom; teacher training in multigrade teaching; support for multigrade teachers; and epistemologies supporting multigrade teaching.

## 2.1 Understanding multigrade teaching

Multigrade teaching has a long history, as the majority of state schools in the USA in the nineteenth century were multigrade or one-room schools (Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 4). Monograde teaching became a norm later, at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century (Thom & Shaw, in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 4). Multigrade teaching, however, remains an important part of schooling in both developed and developing countries – but for different reasons. In developed countries, the number of learners in multigrade classes is increasing due to the movement of people from one location to another. De Valk, Huisman and Noam (2012: 63) explain that people in developed countries migrate when seeking asylum or a labour market and when returning to their former colonies. In developing countries, however,

and particularly in rural communities, the rise in multigrade classes is linked to an increase in children accessing primary schools (Thom & Shaw in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 4).

It would seem that scholars and education practitioners do not share a common appreciation for or understanding of multigrade teaching (Brown 2010: 5). For many, the concept of multigrade teaching remains contested, which has made it challenging to reach consensus on its meaning. Joubert (2010: 58) argues that, while the concept of multigrade teaching (MGT) is not worldwide, the practice is universal. Meanwhile, Little (2006a: 4) clarifies that understandings of multigrade teaching differ from country to country, with a variety of terms being used to describe what is recognised as multigrade classes: combination class, composite class, vertically-grouped class, family-grouped class, multi-aged class, consecutive class, double class, class multigrade, class unique. Despite these various descriptions and terminologies being used in a variety of situations to indicate what is meant by a multigrade class, it should not be assumed, says Little (2006a: 4), that they mean the same in different countries, communities and contexts.

Brown (2010: 8) asserts that, despite the fact that 'multigrade', multi-age' and 'composite' groups are frequently used interchangeably, these terms are not synonymous. 'Multi-age' suggests the existence of age variations and differentiations among learners. He explains that there therefore can be a wide range of ages in any class, sometimes varying by quite a number of years. A class does not have to be multigrade for it to be based on differences in the ages of learners. Age differences exist among learners even in classes that are usually classified as single grade. Therefore, a multi-age class can be monograde or multigrade (Brown, 2010: 8). A composite class, for example, says Brown (2010: 8), consists of two or more classes working in the same classroom with one teacher, but usually with separate curricula. This means that, in a composite class, each grade follows its selected learning programme or curriculum. What is special about a composite class is that the curriculum maintains its traditional monograde structure and is taught strictly through separate grade materials (Brown 2010: 8).

A multigrade class is distinct from both a multi-age and composite class because it results from joining learners of two or more, usually adjacent, grade levels in one class for instruction by one

teacher, regardless of age (Brown, 2010: 8). Thus, with the multigrade arrangement there is an emphasis on adherence to gradedness. As such, labels such as ‘multilevel’, ‘multiskill’ or ‘multipersonality’ fail to capture the nature and essence of multigrade (Hargreaves in Brown, 2010: 8). Another feature that distinguishes multigrade teaching from a multi-age or composite class is the fact that the curriculum being shared in a multigrade class is integrated. As Little (1995: 1) indicates, multigrade teaching is the “teaching of learners of different ages, grades and abilities in the same group…it is to differentiate from 'mono-grade' teaching in which learners within the same grade are assumed to be more similar in terms of age and ability”.

Similarly, the Centre for Education Policy Development ([CEPD], 2011: 4) defines multigrade teaching in terms of learners who are in different grades being taught by one teacher in one classroom, which usually involves grades 1, 2, 3 and 4. While learners from grades 1 up to 6 are grouped together in countries such as Pakistan and Australia (Birch & Lally in CEPD, 2011: 4), multigrade teaching in Malaysia involves the instruction of learners from two or more grade levels close to each other (Brown, 2010: 6). For example, grades 1 and 2, or grade 4 and 5 would be combined, rather than grade 1 and 3 or grade 2 and 4, because no grade should be skipped in the grouping. In Indonesia, multigrade teaching involves a teacher teaching more than one grade at the same time, either in different classrooms or in the same room divided by sliding doors (Little in Brown, 2010: 7). For the purpose of this study, the understanding of multigrade teaching refers to learners who are in different grades, which are close to each other, being taught by one teacher in one class.

In China, terms such as ‘multigrade class’ or ‘multiple-grouped teachings’ are the preferred definitional approaches (Brown, 2010: 7). These terms are generally more reflective of ability level and age-based groupings than grade-level differences. In other words, multigrade classes may be arranged according to the ability level and age base of the learners. A similar situation is found in multi-ethnic countries, such as the Philippines, where a teacher might teach two or more grade levels in one classroom (Birch & Lally in Brown, 2010: 6). However, as Brown (2010: 6) notes, while the situations might be similar, the motivations for these settings might be different.

While multigrade teaching in China might mean teaching a class of learners with different ability levels, in the Philippines it might mean teaching a class of learners from different ethnic groups who are to be taught in their native languages (Birch & Lally in Brown, 2010: 7). In Greece, where multigrade schools are called monograde schools, the number of teachers, rather than the grade level groupings, is counted. For example, in a one-teacher school where one teacher teaches all grades levels (grades 1 to 6), the school is called a monograde school (Brown, 2010: 7). In addition, if the school has two teachers, it is called a two-grade school. If the school has three teachers, it is called three-grade school, and so on. However, if the school has a teacher for each of its grades it is called a multigrade school (Brown, 2010: 7). Therefore, conceptual understandings of multigrade teaching are often re-interpreted and re-defined depending on the particular needs of school communities.

In South Africa, multigrade teaching is not unique (Joubert, 2010: 10). Multigrade schools comprise 27% of all schools in the country (CEPD, 2011: 18). According to the Centre for Multigrade Education, multigrade teaching is used in 7 000 South African schools, most of which are located in rural or remote areas (Joubert, 2010: 58). Vinjevold and Schinder (1997: 2) explain that multigrade schools in South Africa are generally in rural or remote areas, characterised by extreme disadvantages of inadequate facilities, such as a lack of classrooms and libraries, the absence of infrastructure such as roads, electricity, telephones and water, and untrained teachers. The biggest number of multigrade schools is found in Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal (CEPD, 2010: 18). In addition, the number of multigrade schools in the Free State and Mpumalanga has been reduced over the last five years due to the incorporation and termination of small schools and the movement of farm populations to urban areas (CEPD, 2010: 18).

In Namibia, multigrade teaching is viewed as an approach for increased access and school retention (MoE, 2011b: 7). In addition, multigrade schools are divided into two groups, namely full multigrade and partial multigrade schools. In full multigrade schools, all the grades are taught through a multigrade mode, while in partial multigrade schools, some of the grades are

taught through a multigrade teaching mode, while other grades are taught in a monograde mode. Multigrade teaching in Namibia emanated from the low enrolment of learners, especially in rural areas, and the implementation of the staff norms policy of 2001, that required a ratio of 1/35 teachers to learners (MoE, 2011a: 57). It is also used in rural areas, for example where the number of school-going children is too few to form a class. In such situations, multigrade teaching becomes the teaching mode.

The history of multigrade teaching has been moulded primarily by population with regard to the extension of universal primary education, while pedagogical theories have also led to an interest in multigrade teaching (Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 4). The reasons for multigrade classes in Namibia are not different to those in other developing countries; multigrade teaching has been a teaching practice since the introduction of formal education (MoE, 2011a: 13). However, it became more prominent after independence, when the reforms proposed it to be a teaching norm (MBEC, 1996: 27). In January 1996, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture issued a Pilot Curriculum guide that provided an outline for piloting the new Basic Education in Namibia. This was the first time after independence that multigrade classes were regarded as a teaching norm, with the directive that special attention ought to be given to grade 1 (MBEC, 1996: 27). In other words, where possible in a multigrade school, the grade 1 class should be taught in a monograde setting. However, while the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture acknowledged multigrade classes as a teaching norm, it did not provide the necessary training for multigrade teaching.

## 2.2 Benefits of multigrade classes

The literature on multigrade teaching stresses the benefits of the multigrade classes (Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 8), which include the following: expansion of access to education, cognitive achievement of learners (academic achievement of learners), social benefits and personal effects, and psychological benefits. Little (2005: 7) argues that multigrade teaching is essential in relation to the education for all (EFA) goal of access and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are considered to fight poverty. For millions of children who mostly live in economically underprivileged areas, multigrade classes are the only effective way to access

education. For example, it is estimated that 15 to 25 million nomadic and pastoralist children worldwide are not in school (Little, 2005: 7). Thomas and Shaw (in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 8) indicate that the World Bank report argues that multigrade schools fulfil an important role in improving access to primary education. Multigrade teaching plays also a crucial role in the academic achievements of learners.

Vinjevold and Schindler (1997: 8) argue that the literature is inconsistent and inconclusive on the impact of multigrade teaching on academic achievement. In addition, many of the studies conducted in North America and Europe to assess the effect of multigrade teaching on academic achievement claim that there are no significant differences in learner achievement between multigrade and monograde classrooms, as confirmed by the following studies:

- A review of thirteen experimental studies conducted in America and Europe respectively, assessing academic achievement in monograde and multigrade classes found no differences in overall learner achievement (Miller, in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 10). The limited evidence suggests that there may be differences depending on subject and level, but there are not enough studies to make safe generalisations about which subjects or grade levels are best for multigrade teaching.

- In an investigation of the effects of multigrade classes on learner achievement in reading and mathematics in the Mesa Public Schools in North-America, the District formed multigrade classes from adjacent grade levels to reduce class loads and numbers of teachers. Learners retained their grade level assignments and maintained their grade-specific curricula. The sample included 3 360 third to sixth graders in three groups: multigrade classes, monograde classes from schools with multigrade classes, and monograde classes from schools without multigrade classes. The results of the tests indicated that multigrade classes have no detrimental effects on reading and mathematics achievement, with one exception: the mathematics achievement of average learners (Rule, in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 10).

- A few studies done in America and Europe, respectively, provide slightly different views to those described above. Ansah (in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 11), for example, claims that a review of selected literature on the relation between multi-grouping and academic achievement suggests that the effectiveness of multigrade teaching in reading and mathematics is mixed. Some children seem to benefit from multigrade classes, while others do better in monograde classes.

- Some studies carried out in America and Europe respectively; suggest that learners in multigrade classes outperform learners in monograde classes, both in terms of social and academic development (Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 11). In addition, the youngest learners or those at the lower levels of the multigrade classes appear to benefit most. Nye (in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 11) presents the findings of the longitudinal School Success Study (SSS), which attempted to determine the academic and social effects of multigrade classes on Tennessee elementary school learners. The study indicated that learners from multigrade classes in the first year of study significantly outscored those from monograde classes on test vocabulary, reading and mathematics.

- Dever (in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 11) attempts to explain why younger learners in multigrade classes outperformed those in monograde classes through Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory. Children receiving peer assistance can stretch their learning beyond their individual accomplishment.

Multigrade classes are viewed as an effective way to permit small schools to continue to function in isolated or rural communities (Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 9). Multigrade classes are also understood to benefit the social development of learners (De Bord, Pratt & Miller in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 9). De Bord *et al.* (in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 9) for example, examined the views of teachers experienced in working with mixed-aged groups from birth through to 12 years old. The teachers agreed that both older and younger children learn sharing, new skills and new roles more readily in this set up. While older learners learn patience and fulfil leadership

roles, younger learners more rapidly learn sharing, new skills and language. Miller (in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 9) reviews twenty-one quantitative studies of learners in the first six grades, and found that multigrade learners strongly outperformed monograde learners on measures of effect, attitudes and social relationships. One explanation offered for the improved social development of learners in multigrade classes is that a range of levels of maturity, perspectives and experience contribute to the learning process and that the heterogeneous interaction of age groups contributes to social growth and understanding, as well as to academic growth (Levine, in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 9).

A number of studies have described the psychological benefits of grouping learners of different chronological and developmental stages in a single class (Marshak, Pratt, Buston & Way, in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 10). Buston (in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 10) for example, argues that multigrade classes are a means of providing continuity between home and school with a minimum of psychological and emotional shock. In most instances in multigrade classes, learners from the same family sit together in one classroom, which creates an atmosphere of harmony.

## 2.3 Prevalence of multigrade teaching

Multigrade teaching is prevalent at the primary school level in many countries (Brown, 2010: 25). Juvane (in Brown, 2010: 25) asserts that multigrade teaching is also a common feature of primary schools in different African nations, but that insufficient published data is available. According to Brown (2010: 25), what is known is that a large proportion of primary school teachers worldwide are involved in teaching several grade levels in one classroom throughout the school year.

Little (2006b: 5) presents the following statistics on the prevalence of multigrade teaching in different parts of the world: in England in 2000, 25.4% of all classes in primary education; in France in 2000, 29% of all classes in primary education; in Ireland in 2001, 42% of primary

school classes; in Norway in 2000, 34% of all primary school classes; in Nepal in 1998, almost all primary schools; in Peru in 1988, 21 100 primary schools and 41 000 multigrade teachers; and in India in 1986, 84 % of primary schools had three teachers or less.

In South Africa, according to Educational Management Information Systems (EMIS) -2010 for the Provincial Education Department (PED), (in CEPD, 2011: 17), the prevalence of multigrade schools across the nine provinces is as follows: Eastern Cape (26.88%), Free State (18.09%), Gauteng (38.63%), KwaZulu-Natal (19.69%), Limpopo (41.35%), Mpumalanga (25.00%), Northern Cape (13.83%), North West (29.49%) and Western Cape (15.35%), with 27% of all schools in the country being multigrade schools. The Limpopo province had the highest (41.35%) number of schools with multigrade teaching, while the Northern Cape had the lowest (13.83%) number of schools offering multigrade teaching.

In Namibia, according to EMIS-2009 (in MoE, 2011a: 15), the prevalence of multigrade schools in thirteen regions was as follows: Caprivi (4.8%), Erongo (1.2%), Hardap (3,6%), Karas (3.4%), Kavango (19%), Khomas (0.6%), Kunene (3%), Ohangwena (14.5%), Omaheke (2%), Omusati (16%), Oshana (8%), Oshikoto (11.8%) and Otjozondjupa (3.8%), with 16.4% of schools in the country offered multigrade teaching. The Kavango region had the highest (19%) number of schools offering multigrade teaching, while the Khomas region had the lowest (0.6%) number of schools offering multigrade teaching.

According to the information provided by the Kavango Regional Office of Education on the 7 January 2014, the prevalence of multigrade classes in the eleven circuits in this region was as follows: Bunya (50%), Kandjimi (52%), Mpungu (77%), Mukwe (45%), Ncamagoro (61%), Ncuncuni (29%), Ndiyona (59%), Nzinze (73%), Rundu (11%), Shambyu (68%) and Shinyungwe (59%). Looking closer at these data, the Mpungu circuit had the highest percentage (77%), while the Ncuncuni circuit (29%) has the lowest percentage in the region. The overall percentage of multigrade schools in the Kavango region for the current academic year stands at 54%.

## 2.4 Rationale and opportunities for multigrade teaching

Multigrade teaching is said to arise from either necessity or choice (Brunswic & Valerien 2004; Little in CEPD, 2011: 5). According to Little (2006b: 19-20), in cases where multigrade teaching arises from necessity, this is determined by factors such as:

- Schools in areas of low population density, where schools are widely spread and inaccessible and enrolments are low. Schools may have one or two teachers for all grades.
- Schools that comprise a cluster of classrooms spread across different locations, in which some are multigrade classes and others are monograde classes.
- Schools in areas of population growth and school expansion, where enrolments in the expanding upper grades remain small and teacher numbers are low.
- Schools in areas where parents send their children to more popular schools within reasonable travelling distance, leading to a decline in the potential population of learners and teachers in the less popular school.
- Schools in which the number of learners admitted to a class exceeds official norms for class size, necessitating the grouping of some learners from one grade with learners from another grade.
- Mobile schools, in which one or more teachers move with nomadic learners covering a wide range of ages and grades.

There are cases, particularly in the developed world, where multigrade teaching has occurred by choice. In these cases a decision is made by policymakers and/or teachers to adopt a multigrade arrangement for pedagogic reasons (CEPD, 2011: 6). An example of this is in England, where multigrade teaching was deliberately adopted in order to implement child-centred approaches in which learners are encouraged to learn through social interaction with learners in different grades (CEPD, 2011: 6). Proponents of multigrade teaching argue that this model of teaching is a powerful pedagogic tool for promoting independent and individualised learning (Little, in CEPD

2011: 6). This idea is based largely on possibilities for social development, as well as for peer and cross-age learning among children aged five to seven years.

Multigrade teaching in Namibia, however, is not by choice. Rather, it is a critical policy adopted by the Ministry of Education as it sought to provide schooling for out of school children in areas of low population density (MoE, 2011b: 14). The children in these areas have a right to quality education, just like any other children. Therefore, under such circumstances, multigrade teaching becomes the only available choice for these communities (MoE, 2011b: 14).

In focusing on the reduction of direct instruction and accessing the curriculum, Berry (in Little, 2006a: 41-42) identifies some of the following opportunities for multigrade classes:

- Reduced direct instruction: Learners in multigrade classes are exposed to less direct instruction from the teacher compared with those in monograde classes. However, because they mostly work in groups, the teacher monitors their progress and attends to the challenges they are facing.

- Access to the curriculum: Lower-achieving learners in multigrade classrooms have incidental exposure to the curriculum for the lower grade, both during the whole class instruction and when working in groups. This enhances the mastering of concepts that have been poorly understood in the lower grades.

- Learning to learn: In multigrade classes, learners are encouraged to work independently. With sufficient learning and reference materials available, learners develop their learning-to-learn skills. For example, some learners in multigrade class were observed using dictionaries on their own.

- Effects of peer instruction: This occurs informally when learners are working in a grade-level group that is not directly being instructed by the teachers. Their learning is more likely to be

'scaffolded' by their peers. This increase in learners' interaction is likely to maximise the learning opportunities for all levels of attainment.

- Impact on small group instruction: Teachers in multigrade classes are much more likely to engage with learners intensively in small groups. This may offer particular support to the low-achieving learners who are not confident to ask questions.

In addition, the Ministry of Education (2011b: 28) asserts that multigrade teachers indicated special opportunities offered by multigrade teaching for both teachers and learners, such as that learners develop independent work habits and self-study skills; cooperation between different age groups is more common, resulting in collective ethics, concern and responsibility; learners develop positive attitudes about helping each other; it offers ample opportunity for learners to become resourceful and independent learners; classroom provides opportunities for learners to gain self-knowledge as they interact with older and younger peers, and in planning for two or more years; and teachers have opportunities to be more flexible with the curriculum, planning projects around learner interests.

## 2.5 Some of the challenges of multigrade teaching

All the teacher training offerings at the University of Namibia (UNAM) are structured for monograde teaching only, and no provision is made for multigrade teaching. There are quite a large number of multigrade teachers who are supposed to be trained in the country. Multigrade teaching requires professional training in order for the teachers to cope with the challenges they are facing in their schools. These challenges include: how they are able to coordinate learning in more the one grade in one class at the same time; the adaption of the monograde curriculum to be used effectively in multigrade classrooms; and so on. One of the challenges facing multigrade teachers is insufficient time allocated to teaching (MoE, 2011b: 17).

In Namibian schools, the duration of one period of teaching per class in both monograde and multigrade classes is forty minutes (MoE, 2011b: 17). In the opinion of the multigrade teachers, the equal allocation for both monograde and multigrade teaching is unfair, because multigrade teachers are expected to attend to the needs of learners operating in different grades, while also dealing with their individual problems. Multigrade teaching demands more with regard to organisation and lesson planning (MoE, 2011b: 17). Due to this limited teaching time, learners who struggle often receive inadequate attention, resulting in inadequate acquisition of skills and knowledge.

Given the multigrade classroom setting, multigrade teachers are required to plan more intensively than monograde teachers (MoE, 2011b: 17). In addition, multigrade teachers are required to organise the classroom and meet the needs of each grade of learners without compromising the learning of any particular group of learners. Multigrade teachers are expected to create a favourable teaching and learning environment. In order for multigrade teachers to satisfactorily execute all these professional duties, intensive professional training is of paramount importance. The effective coordination of all the class activities of the multigrade classroom is another challenge.

Managing multigrade classes, where multiple activities are likely to occur at the same time, is important for creating favourable conditions for learning (MoE, 2011b: 18). In addition, bringing different grades together in one classroom is a challenge on its own. Multigrade teachers are expected to ensure that effective teaching and learning are taking place in such classrooms. However, these teachers experience challenges in the form of management and disciplinary problems; keeping all grades in their classroom on task throughout the school day; and dealing with a shortage of resources. In Namibia, multigrade schools lack resources in terms of permanent structures, clean water, chairs and desks, and teaching materials (MoE, 2011b: 20). Teachers are allocated to tents instead of permanent structures, and learners sit on the classroom floor or outside on the ground. Because of the lack of support from both the regional and national level, teachers feel isolated, both professionally and socially (MoE, 2011b: 21).

## 2.6 Classroom management techniques for multigrade teaching

Managing a multigrade classroom is problematic because there is more than one grade level in the classroom (Juvane, 2005: 4). This implies that the class teacher should be skilled in managing teaching to minimise time wasting during which learners are not productively engaged in tasks. In other words, according to Kyne (2005: 10), teachers should be aware of different ways of grouping learners; the importance of independent study areas where learners can go when they have finished their work; and employing approaches to record keeping that are more flexible than those prevalent in the monograde classroom. In addition, Berry (in Brown, 2010: 52) suggests that learners also have responsibility in the process of multigrade classroom management. Brown (2010: 52) argues that learners need to be taught the value of independence and cooperation, and that this can be done by involving them in classroom decision making. This implies that, in national cultures and education systems where little or no value in placed on values such as independence or cooperation, achieving effective multigrade teaching could be a challenge, regardless of the subject areas or discipline involved (Brown, 2010: 53).

## 2.7 Language of learning and teaching in multigrade classroom

The significance of language in teaching and learning cannot be emphasised enough (CEPD, 2011: 48). Language is considered a key factor in the delivery of quality basic education, given that it is a medium for communicating and understanding what one is being taught (Alexander & Benson in CEPD, 2011: 48). It is increasingly acknowledged, worldwide and particularly in post-colonial contexts, that the first language is crucial in setting the basis for one's lifelong learning (Ludi in CEPD, 2011: 48). However, the practice in many developing countries remains severely in contrast to this understanding. These countries, in Africa and elsewhere, continue to use foreign languages, particularly those of their former colonial masters, in education. As a matter of urgency, attention needs to be given to improving language teaching and learning in those schools (CEPD, 2011: 48).

Obanya (2004: 10) argues that teaching learners in their earlier years in an unfamiliar language is both mentally and physically taxing. Benson (2005: 2) avers that submersion, teaching in a language that is not familiar, results in teachers being compelled to translate or code-switch in order to help learners grasp the meaning. This way of teaching not only results in inefficient concept learning, but also impedes language learning, as learners tend to sit silently or repeat unconsciously after the teacher without understanding. This, according to Benson (2005: 2), results in frustration and eventually leads to problems for learners, such as repetition, failure and even dropout. Benson (2005: 2) argues that problems of submersion are worsened by low levels of teacher education, poorly designed and inappropriate curricula, and a lack of adequate school facilities, particularly when the language of teaching is also foreign to the teacher. A similar argument against submersion has been advanced in Europe in the light of the influx of immigrants who speak languages other than those spoken in their host countries (Ludi in CEPD, 2011: 48).

## 2.8 Teacher Education in multigrade teaching

Trained teachers have a better grasp of subject knowledge, pedagogy and classroom practices than untrained teachers (Hammond, 2005: 9). Furthermore, there is evidence that the generally negative perceptions of multigrade teachers about their work can be alleviated by the provision of better resources and better formal training (Kyne & Lingam in CEPD, 2011: 53).

In countries such as Finland, multigrade teaching is already embedded in teacher education curricula (Brown, 2010: 55). In other words teachers are trained during pre-service training as how to handle multigrade teaching because multigrade teaching is incorporated in the curricula, while in Vietnam, multigrade teachers are trained to give different lessons to learners at different grade levels at the same time (Pridmore in Brown, 2010: 55). The following three specific modules on multigrade teaching are integrated in the teacher education and training programme in Sri Lanka: (a) Module One: The concept of multigrade teaching: A generic training

programme; (b) Module Two: The content of multigrade teaching: Reflecting on the challenges and needs analysis; and (c) Module Three: Learning and teaching of mathematics in multigrade or multilevel settings: Adopting a learner and materials centred approach (Vithanapathirana, 2006: 1). A similar programme to that in Sri Lanka is also presented in Papua New Guinea (DoE in Brown, 2010: 55), supported by multigrade teaching policy, effected in January 2001, for primary and community schools.

While there are many programmes, as Brown (2010: 56) explains, that meet the needs of multigrade teaching and are supported by multilateral organisations, multigrade teaching, according to Joubert (2007: 1), is not addressed specifically in teacher education programmes in the majority of African countries. Governments tend to focus on improving conventional schools (i.e. monograde schools), often leaving the development of multigrade schools to local initiatives, which quite often means workshops and other ad hoc sessions. Many in-service training programmes embrace a cascade training model of dissemination (Little, 2005: 16). Brown (2010: 56) argues that the cascade model is an approach often adopted by African countries – as evidenced by a technical workshop attended by practitioners from six African countries that was organised in Uganda in November 2004 to test new modules for multigrade teaching. In July 2005, Tanzania hosted a similar workshop for the first time, attended by eleven countries that were represented by policymakers, curriculum developers, educators and teachers. This was followed by a workshop in Lesotho in 2007. The major discussions, according to Juvane (in Brown, 2010: 56), were on issues relating to the training of multigrade teachers. In other words, efforts to address multigrade teaching at the level of teacher training are only at a discussion stage in most African countries.

In Namibia, for example, the teacher education institutions in the country make no provision for separate training for multigrade teaching (MoE, 2011a: 13). Hence the training of multigrade teachers was considered during the revision of the Education Theory and Practice (ETP) course for Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD). The biggest challenge lies in the adequate preparation of teachers for multigrade teaching (MoE, 2011a: 13). Currently, the Ministry of

Education has established a committee at the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) that offers three-day to one-week workshops for teachers teaching multigrade classes in the country (MoE, 2011b: 10). The workshop covers the following topics: Definition of multigrade teaching, the rationale for multigrade teaching, multigrade organisational options/approaches, time allocation and timetabling, teaching and learning strategies, classroom organisation and management, advantages and challenges of multigrade teaching, lesson planning and preparation, experiences and challenges in multigrade settings, solutions and recommendations for multigrade settings, and assessment in multigrade teaching.

Brown (2010: 56) says that the cascade model is being questioned. Recent studies of a cascade multigrade teacher training programme in Nepal traced its effectiveness from context design at the national level to the training progress at local level and the implementation of strategies in the classroom (Little & Suzuki in Brown, 2010: 56). Brown (2010: 56) argues that, although teachers made gains in their knowledge of useful strategies and activities for multigrade teaching, especially in the provision and use of self-learning activities and classroom monitors, evidence for the incorporation of the training messages at the classroom level was lacking. Suzuki (in Little, 2006a: 331) identifies a number of areas in which improvements could be made in the future, but also identifies the main obstacles that would endure even if training were to improve. These include: the lack of awareness on the part of policymakers of the existence and needs of multigrade classes; the absence of teacher-trainer experts in the practices of multigrade teaching; and the overwhelming negative attitudes towards it held by teachers, their trainers and supervisors due to the challenges of multigrade teaching.

Brown (2010: 57) argues further that these findings suggest that the cascade model should be used with caution, or might not even be best approach. Perhaps the best approach is to train teachers in multigrade teaching during their initial teacher education (Lingam, 2007: 192), rather than addressing it using professional development programmes. Studies on multigrade teaching, as evidenced in the sections above, generally report a lack of professional training of teachers for multigrade settings (Kyne Lingam & Little in Brown, 2010: 57). In many countries, teacher

education programmes continue to train teachers for teaching in a monograde class context (Little, 2006b: 328). The evidence furthermore suggests that teachers are not trained in multigrade teaching, but are merely orientated (Vithanapathirana, 2006: 1). Brown (2010: 57) argues that issues relating to epistemology, which provides the conceptual tools to guide teachers to navigate the new pedagogy, have been under-emphasized. This has hindered the practice, as well as teacher conceptual development, innovation, creative thinking and imagination.

Little (2005: 16) argues that pre-service and in-service education and training for teachers on the needs of the multigrade class are vital. For multigrade teachers to be effective in their teaching tasks, they should be trained professionally (Lingam, Mason & Burns, in Brown, 2010: 56). In addition, Chandra (in Brown, 2010: 56) emphasises the need for on-going professional development of teachers to enable them to be at the forefront not only of pedagogical techniques, but also of school curriculum and communications technologies. For this to happen, teacher training should openly address the context-specific needs, diverse as they often are, of multigrade teachers.

## 2.9 Support for multigrade teachers

A number of international studies point to the advantages of various forms of external support in providing effective multigrade teaching (Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 18). Similarly, Titus (in Brown, 2010: 54) argues that multigrade teachers need both internal and external support (internal support refers to support receive by teachers within the school, while external support refers to support from outside the school), and urges the communities in which multigrade schools are located to be involved in school affairs. Vinjevold and Schindler (1997: 18) suggest that the types of support that are required are community support, local or regional government support, national policy support, and support from school principals.

Vinjevold and Schindler (1997: 18) assert that local governments in Indonesia, for example, provide funds to encourage community participation in rural schools, and multigrade schools in

India are encouraged to foster closer school community ties. In other words communities in India realise that in order for multigrade schools to succeed they should offer their full support. These are done through providing funds, teaching materials and human resources to multigrade schools (Vinjevold and Schindler, 1997: 18). Titus (in Brown, 2010: 54) argues that the communities in which multigrade schools are located often do not see the value of education, and often speak a different language from the 'official' one of the school. For this reason, Titus (in Brown, 2010: 54) recommends the involvement of the community in the life of the school as a strategy to serve as a resource, or that the school might extend the curriculum out into the community. There is a need to train multigrade teachers in approaches that would help them develop relations between the school and the communities, and local or regional administrative support contributes immensely to the success of multigrade teaching.

Local or regional pedagogic and administrative support is also seen as essential for effective multigrade teaching. Teachers in one- and two-teacher schools, in particular, experience both social and professional isolation. Pedagogical support is recommended to stabilise this isolation. On-site support in isolated rural areas can be both expensive and time-consuming; hence various forms of support delivery are suggested, such as regional resource centres, newsletters and radio programmes. The creation of opportunities for multigrade teachers to meet, exchange experiences and collect resources is also recommended in the literature (Thomas & Shaw, in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 18). Training for pedagogical advisers in multigrade teaching methods and materials is seen as essential for the provision of these support activities (Solstad, in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 18). Thomas and Shaw (in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 18) suggest that support for multigrade teachers in rural areas is best achieved through a decentralised education system with clear sets of incentives and systems of accountability. Multigrade teaching requires support from national policy for its success to be realised.

The recent literature on multigrade classes points to the importance of national policy in delivering effective multigrade teaching (Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 18). An inter-regional workshop on single-teacher schools and multigrade classes in Norway (Vinjevold & Schindler,

1997: 18) recommended that the first step would be to persuade governments and legislators of the advantages of multigrade schools. Thomas and Shaw (in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 18) asserted, drawing on the experiences of many developing countries, that there should be two stages in implementing a multigrade programme: a pilot phase and an expansion phase. In the expansion phase, national policy decisions are necessary with regard to the creation of a decentralised administrative system; the provision of teacher training in multigrade techniques; the recruitment and support of multigrade teachers; curriculum adaption; and the development and allocation of resources to multigrade schools. Thomas and Shaw (in Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 19) see teacher training and curriculum and materials development as the two most important areas requiring national policy. They recommended that, because effective multigrade teaching practices are applicable in monograde classes, they should be introduced in the general teacher training curriculum and that materials development units should be directed to develop materials suited to multigrade teaching. School principals play a crucial role in providing support to multigrade teachers.

The support of school principals for multigrade teachers ranges from ordinary advice on how to implement multigrade teaching effectively, to staff development training in multigrade teaching at school level or at cluster level (MoE, 2011a: 77). In addition, most of the support offered to multigrade teachers is based on class visits coupled with positive feedback. School principals also look for opportunities with the Ministry of Education or other stakeholders that have interest in providing workshops on multigrade teaching and promoting the education standard in general. They also assist multigrade teachers with knowing how to help learners who experience difficulties in learning and encourage them to have remedial teaching after school (MoE, 2011a: 77).

## 2.10 Epistemology supporting multigrade teaching

Brown (2010: 19) argues that, for multigrade teachers to be more adaptive and active, they should first understand epistemology or the theory of knowledge of multigrade teaching, as the epistemology is already influencing areas of activities in the domain of research on teaching and

learning. Scholars argue that multigrade teaching is best practised in an environment in which learners are able to participate in their learning and work collaboratively with each other (Little, Kyne & Lingam in Brown, 2010: 19). Similarly, Vygotsky argues that "it is through others that we develop into ourselves" (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006: 192). Constructivist epistemology of teaching and learning views teaching as a process, rather than a product, in terms of which knowledge is gained by active participation. According to Kyne (in Brown, 2010: 19), collaborative teaching strategies in multigrade teaching implicitly suggest a constructivist perspective as a conceptual tool to understand the practices and provide the basis for processes in multigrade teaching.

The emergence of a constructivist stance in thinking about multigrade teaching is unsurprising (Brown, 2010: 20). It is a progressive theory, which Lingam (2007: 186) believes enables teachers and learners to engage jointly in the process of teaching and learning. Kyne (2005: 3) argues that the volume of the workload facing multigrade teachers necessitates the abandonment of teaching philosophies associated with knowledge transmission or teaching in a single grade. Constructivist teachers focus on ways in which individual learners make sense of their experiences, and increasingly see learning as an activity in which shared meanings are constructed socially (Dossey, Sierpinska & Lerman in Brown, 2010: 20). Brown (2010: 20) asserts that the discourse on multigrade teaching therefore suggests that multigrade teaching is more likely to flourish in a learner-centred environment.

The other main constructivist approach, which sees learning as happening through social interactions, emphasises the role of context in the process of learning facts, concepts, principles and skills, often through problem solving (Brown, 2010: 20). This view is well presented in the literature (Lingam *et al*. in Brown, 2010: 20). The argument is that learning is social and hence a language-based activity. Studies on multigrade teaching have firmly placed the suggested strategies for the development of multigrade teaching materials and learning environments in collaborative construction through social negotiation (Tsolakidis *et al*. in Brown, 2010: 20). In Lingam's (2007: 186) opinion, the implementation of pedagogical techniques such as peer

tutoring, small group teaching and independent study helps learners to find learning meaningful. Although Lingam does not refer directly to constructivism, his assertions above reflect an open acceptance of the constructivist approach in multigrade teaching.

In this chapter I have presented literature that creates a holistic picture of multigrade teaching. The chapter highlights the necessity for multigrade teachers to be trained professionally, which is the central argument of the study. The next chapter deals with the research design and research methodology.

# Chapter 3

# Research design and methodology

In this chapter I present the research design and methodology that I used to investigate multigrade teaching in three rural lower primary schools in Ncuncuni circuit in the Kavango region in Namibia. The chapter also includes aspects such as sampling and population, data construction methods, and descriptions of the three schools, the teachers, learners and communities.

## 3.1 Research design

My decision to adopt a qualitative research design was based on Miles and Huberman's (1994: 6) assertion that qualitative research creates a holistic picture of the phenomenon within the context it occurred. Similarly, McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 17) explain that qualitative research presents data as a narration with words. This research design is appropriate for this study because all the data are presented in the form of descriptions – in words, and not in statistics, graphs or numbers. In addition, qualitative research is concerned more with understanding the social phenomenon from the participants' perspectives. I conducted research at three rural lower primary schools to observe and interview teachers who were trained as monograde teachers but were expected to teach multigrade classes.

McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 398) clarify that qualitative research sometimes uses a case study design, meaning that the data analysis focuses on one phenomenon – which in this case was multigrade teaching. The study focuses on the challenges of multigrade classes and the teaching strategies adopted by teachers in multigrade classrooms. In other words, the study attempts to identify some of the challenges of multigrade teaching and teaching strategies employed by multigrade teachers who are not trained to teach multigrade classes.

Leedy and Omrod (in Fouché & Delport, 2011: 64) explain that the qualitative approach is used to answer questions about the complex nature of a phenomenon with the purpose of explaining and understanding it from the participants' point of view. This can be done by employing several data construction methods, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires and case studies.

## 3.2 Methodology

The study employed a phenomenological epistemology, according to which the researcher observes, records and interprets "lived experiences" through clear and detailed descriptions (Magrini, 2012: 1). Vandenberg (1997: 10) explains phenomenology as a way of describing a phenomen in the lived world, or an explanation of the movements of consciousness that enable one to become aware of phenomena, or both of these together. As a branch of philosophy, however, it describes how adults are aware of things. In this case, the study aimed to describe the understanding and experiences of rural lower primary teachers with regard to multigrade teaching.

According to Bromley (in Zucker, 2009: 1), phenomenology is a systematic inquiry into an event or occurrence that aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest. Phenomenology is the analysis of consciousness, the nature of essence as perceived in consciousness (Pence, 2000: 42). Waghid (2013: 7) explains phenomenology as a paradigm that deals with life experienced internally in our consciousness, that is, the study of phenomena. In addition, phenomenology is concerned mainly with consciousness. This means that the participants are fully aware of the phenomenon. Furthermore, Waghid (2010: 6) explains that phenomenology deals with an attempt to set aside what we already know about something and describes how we can come to know it – a matter of tracing the processes by means of which we give meaning to the world.

Magrini (2012: 1) argues that a phenomenological study is determined by questioning the essential nature of lived experiences. In this context, the study investigated the phenomenon called multigrade teaching. In addition, Babbie and Mouton (in De Vos *et al*., 2011: 8) state that

this approach is called a phenomenological approach, because it aims to understand people and maintains that all human beings are engaged in the process of making sense of their worlds and continuously interpret, create, give meaning to, define, justify and rationalise their daily actions.

The study was personally motivated to gain an understanding of and find answers to the following questions: What is the impact of multigrade teaching on teaching and learning in three rural primary schools in Namibia? What are the challenges facing teachers in multigrade classroom? What teaching strategies are adopted by teachers in a multigrade classroom? How can or should teachers approach teaching and learning in a multigrade classroom? What is necessary for the cultivation and support of effective multigrade schooling in a rural setting? In addressing these questions, I hope to offer insight into and make certain recommendations on ways of addressing the challenges of multigrade teaching in Namibian schools.

## 3.3 Population and sampling

I intentionally adopted purposeful sampling because, as McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 400) explain, a purposeful sample allows the researcher to understand something about the case without requiring or desiring to generalise beyond such a case. In addition, purposeful sampling is done to increase the utility of information constructed from a small group of participants who are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena that the researcher is investigating. The selection of schools was based on the following criteria:

- The schools should offer multigrade teaching,
- The schools should be lower primary schools (grades 1 to 4), and
- The schools should be in Ncuncuni circuit, Kavango region, Namibia.

I meticulously selected lower primary (grades 1-4) schools as my sampling for the study for numerous reasons. Many education researches in Namibia include in most cases urban schools that offer education to learners from grades 5-12 only. Grades 1-4 schools are preparing

learners who in a very crucial stage of their education, they are expected to lay a strong foundations on which they can built on, however, there very few studies that shed light as how teaching and learning are taking place at these schools. The majority of Namibia rural primary schools are operating in very poor classrooms infrastructures with limit support from both the educational authority at regional and national level, I wanted to have the understanding how do the schools manage effective teaching and learning. Due to sparsely populated communities in rural areas, as a result many primary schools are offering multigrade teaching as mode of teaching in which the teachers are not professionally trained for; I wanted to understand as how they manage multigrade teaching.

In order to gain access to the research sites, I obtained permission from the Inspector of Education for Ncuncuni circuit, as well as the principals of the three primary schools. The study included six participants (two teachers at each school). These teachers were observed in their respective classroom settings, and were also interviewed. The classroom observations allowed me to identify the teaching approaches, opportunities and challenges of multigrade teaching.

## 3.4 Data construction methods

Mason (in Holloway, 1997: 45) argues that qualitative researchers sometimes reject the term ‘collecting’ data; instead, they use ‘generating’ data, or even ‘making’ data (Koch, in Holloway, 1997: 45). These terms sometimes are suitable in qualitative approaches because researchers do not merely collect data and describe it in a neutral and detached manner, but are involved in a more creative way: the researcher is seen as actively constructing knowledge (Mason in Holloway, 1997: 45). In terms of my own data construction methods, I purposefully employed structured interviews and classroom observations.

Kvale (in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011: 414) sets out key characteristics of qualitative interviews, which include that the researcher should be able to engage and understand the life world of participants by interpreting the social phenomena; the researcher should be able to

expose and explore the world of the participants, the researcher should be able to use natural language and understand the knowledge of the participants, the researcher should adopt a deliberate openness to new data and phenomena, and qualitative interviews are regarded as a positive and enriching experience for all participants.

I purposefully employed structured interviews as a novice- researcher; firstly, I did not want to end up in the situation of having a large volume of data and not knowing how to handle it. Secondly, sometimes some participants are "sweet-talkers"; they might easily cause the researcher to lose focus of the research questions by providing with a lot of data which may not necessarily relevant to the research focus. In other words, I avoided the condition of collecting a lot of unnecessary data which do not address the research questions. Thirdly, structured interviews saves time, as Cohen *et al*. (2011: 414), explain that a structured interview is one in which the content and procedures are organised in advance. Despite the shortcomings of a structured interview such as the interviewer is left little freedom changes on the pre-determined questions and follow-up questions are minimised (Cohen *et al*., 2011: 414). However, Huffcutt and Arthur (in Creglow, 2012: 1-2) identify the following advantages: it bases questions on an analysis of the target job: in this case the teaching of multigrade classes; it asks the same questions to different participants and it asks specific types of questions.

I interviewed six participants (two per school): three principals and three teachers from the three selected rural primary schools. The Ministry of Education employs a teacher and a principal at each school where the study was conducted. The three school principals who were interviewed also teach multigrade classes. Thus, for the purpose of this study, these principals were interviewed in their capacity as teachers of multigrade classes. In other words, they were asked the same questions as the rest of the interviewees. Before conducting the interview, I spent one week at each school in order to observe, get an understanding of the school environment and ethos, and gain the trust of the teachers to be interviewed. The classroom observations were done on two consecutive days in each classroom, using the observation schedule, which entails noting down what is happening in the multigrade classroom focusing on the following:

- The challenges of teachers in multigrade classrooms and
- The types of teaching strategies adopted by teachers in a multigrade classroom.

According to Marshall, Rossman, Simpson and Tuson (in Cohen *et al*., 2011: 456), observation is more than just looking; rather, it is noticing people, events, behaviours, settings, artefacts, routes and so on systematically. It is a highly adaptable form of data construction that enables the researcher to have access to interaction in a social context and to yield systematic records of many forms of contexts to complement other kinds of data.

Cohen *et al*. (2011: 456) assert that the distinctive feature of observation as a research process is that it offers the researcher the opportunity to construct 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations. In addition, in this way, the researcher can look directly at what is taking place in the situation instead of relying on second-hand information. Observation is the use of immediate awareness or direct understanding, which potentially yields valid or authentic data more readily than would be the case with mediated or inferential approaches.

Robson (in Cohen *et al*., 2011: 456) explains that what people do may differ from what they say, and observation provides a reality check; it also enables a researcher to look afresh at everyday behaviour that otherwise might be taken for granted, expected or go unnoticed (Cooper & Schindler, in Cohen *et al*., 2011: 456). Thus, during observations, all these types of occurrences could be noticed as they unfold in the classroom.

Myles (in Cohen *et al*., 2011: 456) argues that observational data are sensitive to contexts and demonstrate strong environmental validity. In addition, this form of data construction enables me to understand the context of phenomena, to be open-ended and inductive, to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed, discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations, to move beyond perception-based data, for example opinions in interviews, and to access personal knowledge. As observed incidents are less predictable, there is

certain freshness to this form of data construction that is often denied in other forms, such as a questionnaire or test.

Morrison (in Cohen *et al*., 2011: 457) points out that observation enables the researcher to construct data on the physical setting, for example the physical environment and its organisation; the human setting, for example the organisation of people, the characteristics and make-up of groups or individuals being observed, such as gender and class; the interaction setting, for example the interactions that are taking place – formal, informal, planned, unplanned, verbal, non-verbal, etc.; and the programmes setting, for example the resources and their organisation, pedagogic styles, curricula and their organisation.

## 3.5 Descriptions of three schools, teachers, learners and communities

As indicated earlier, this study was conducted at three primary schools in the Kavango region. While the three schools have many similarities, they also have differences. Similarities include that all three are rural lower primary schools that offer formal education to learners from grade 1 to 4. All three schools use Rumanyo, which is a local language, as the medium of instruction from grade 1 to 3, while English is used as the medium of instruction in grade 4.

However, it was discovered during the study that four of the participants and some of the learners at these three schools were speaking Ruwangali, another local language in the Kavango region. One of the Rukwangali teachers (teacher 4 from School B) even spoke Rukwangali during lesson presentations, before converting to Rumanyo, and the same aspect applied to some of the learners. Only two teachers (a man and a woman) were appointed by the government to teach multigrade classes at each school.

The seating arrangements of learners in all six classrooms comprised two big groups according to their grades, facing the teacher. The grade combinations at all these schools were grades 1 and 2, and grades 3 and 4. The age groups of the learners at these three schools ranged from seven to twelve years old. The socio-economic context of all the learners was the same. The learners of

these schools had no exposure to technological devices such as television, computers, cellular phones and so forth. This is attributed to the remoteness of the schools and the economic status of their parents. It was observed that very few of the learners were wearing school uniforms, possibly due to the high levels of unemployment and poverty in the community, which force the majority of people to depend on subsistence farming and social grants from the government.

Despite the numerous challenges facing the community, and the very poor infrastructure, the community attempted to make meaningful contributions to the schooling of their children. These included regular meetings between the school and the parents; feeding programmes in which some of the parents prepare meals for the children at the schools; and fetching firewood in the forest. The parents rotated the responsibility for meal preparation so that equal opportunities for participation were available to the community. They also were involved in the construction of a school fence by providing poles, while the schools purchased wires. In spite of this there was a difference in terms of community participation at three lower primary schools. For instance, in the case of School A, the community was very cooperative and motivated to participate in school affairs. While I was conducting the research, I witnessed one parent who observed the lesson presentation of teacher 1 at this school. School B parents showed moderate interest in partaking in school affairs, while those of School C were hesitant. Teacher 5 at School C stated that the community of his school did not willingly become involved in school affairs. However, they did so after a vigorous follow-up by the principal, especially with the construction of the school fence.

The education authority at the regional level offers support to these schools by providing food such as maize for the school feeding programme, based on the number of enrolled learners at the school. Bags of maize are usually delivered by truck once per term, and schools are required to keep them in storerooms. In cases where a school does not have storeroom, it is the responsibility of the school principal to provide a safe place for storing. Lastly, the education authority at the regional level also supports the schools with school development funds for free compulsory primary education.

Despite the fact that these schools have many characteristics in common, there are some differences that make each school unique. In order to protect the identity of the schools, I used alphabetical letters instead of the names of the schools, and refer to the schools as A, B and C respectively.

School A was established in 1992 to offer formal education to learners in grade 1. The school was then gradually upgraded to offer education to learners from grade 1 to 4, with 84 learners in total. Although the school is located about sixty kilometres from town, it was supplied with electricity and permanent classroom structures, with clean water from boreholes. This school was supervised by a female principal who also taught grade 1 and 2 learners.

School B was established in the late 1970s to offer formal education to grade 1 learners. Its location is very remote – about 75 kilometres from the nearest town – which makes it very difficult to reach. Over time the school began to cater for learners from grade 1 to 4, and currently has a total of 42 learners. All the classrooms of this school are temporary structures; the grade 1 and 2 learners were taught in a tent, while the grade 3 and 4 learners were taught by a female teacher who also served as principal in a structure made of corrugated iron and muddy soil. However, the government was busy constructing a permanent structure that was close to completion at the time of this study. Unlike School A, School B does not have access to electricity and clean water. The community obtains water from a well that they dug themselves.
School C was also established in the late 1970s to provide formal education to the children of subsistence farmers. The school started with grades 1 and 2, and was then upgraded to include grade 4. The school is 150 km from town, accessible by a sandy and muddy road that makes it so difficult to access. Unlike School B, School C had a new, permanent structure, consisting of two classrooms and one storeroom with sufficient new chairs and desks. The school had 34 learners, who mostly travelled long distances to and from school every day. It was led by a male principal who also taught grades 3 and 4 in one classroom. Like School B, School C did not have electricity, but had clean water from a borehole.

Table 3.1 presents a demographic summary of the teachers at the three rural primary schools in Ncuncuni circuit in the Kavango region who participated in the study. The summary comprises information on gender, qualifications obtained, training level, subject specialisations, qualifications in multigrade teaching, years of teaching experience, years of teaching multigrade classes, and home language. The participating teachers are identified by numbers to protect their identity, which means they were numbered and referred to as teachers 1 to 6. These teachers had obtained various qualifications, from Junior Secondary to Bachelor of Education (Honours) degree (Table 3.1). All of these teachers were trained only as monograde teachers, and only one teacher (teacher 3 of School B) indicated that she had attended a one-week training workshop on multigrade teaching.

Table: 3.1 Summary of demographic data of teachers at three rural primary schools in Ncuncuni circuit in the Kavango region.

| School | Teacher | Gender | Qualifications obtained | Training level | Subject specialisations | Qualifications multigrade teaching | Years of teaching experience | Years of teaching multigrade | Home language |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 1 | F | Gr. 12, BETD, ACE | Lower primary | Class teaching | None | 35 | 19 | Rumanyo |
| A | 2 | M | Gr. 12 | Lower primary | Class teaching | None | 7 | 7 | Rukwangali |
| B | 3 | F | Gr. 12, BETD, FDE, B.Ed. Hons. | Upper primary | Languages Upper primary | None | 17 | 2 | Rukwangali |
| B | 4 | M | Gr. 8 | Lower primary | Class teaching | None | 36 | 14 | Rukwangali |
| C | 5 | M | Gr. 12, BETD, DEAL | Lower primary | Class teaching | None | 16 | 7 | Rumanyo |
| C | 6 | F | Gr. 12 | Lower primary | Class teaching | None | 4 | 3 | Rukwangali |

Key: A-C: represents the three schools where the research was conducted, F: Female teacher, M: male teacher, Gr. 8: Junior secondary Grade 8, Gr. 12: senior secondary grade 12, BETD: Basic Education Teacher Diploma, ACE: Advance Certificate in Education, DEAL: Diploma in Education in African Language, FDE: Further Diploma in Education (FDE), and B.Ed. Hons: Bachelor of Education Honours Degree.

In the Namibian context, as summarised in Table 3.1, subject specialisations referred to as class teaching comprise Mathematics and Science, Languages, Social Studies and Commercial Studies. Since teachers trained for lower primary teachings handle all the subjects, class teaching is a concept used to embody this scenario. The levels of teacher training include the following: Lower primary (grades 1 to 4), upper primary (grades 5 to 7), junior secondary (grades 8 to 10) and senior secondary (grades 11 and 12). From the study it was established that most teachers were well placed in their respective category of teacher training specialisation, except for one teacher (teacher 3 of School B), who was supposed to be at an upper primary school but was placed at the lower primary level.

# Chapter 4

# Presentation and discussion of the findings

This chapter presents and discusses the research findings from the data constructed from the interviews with a sample of six teachers with regard to multigrade teaching, and the actual classroom observations of the same teachers in real-time settings. The data was constructed at three rural lower primary schools in the Ncuncuni circuit of the Kavango region in the Northeast of Namibia. As previously explained (Chapter 1), the main aims of the research were to understand the challenges faced by teachers in multigrade classrooms and the types of teaching strategies adopted by teachers in these classrooms.

Before presenting and discussing the findings of the research, it is important to reiterate that the study employed a phenomenological approach, as discussed in the preceding chapter. An understanding of lived experiences marks phenomenology as a method involving the study of small human populations through intensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas in Creswell, 2009: 13). In due course, the researcher sets aside his or her own experiences in order to understand the experiences of the participants in the study (in this case the teachers) (Nieswiadomy in Creswell, 2009: 13). In my analysis of the data I was able to discern two major factors: viz. the teachers' understanding of multigrade teaching, and the differences in the levels of qualifications or professional training of the teachers themselves. In the classroom observations I noticed some technical challenges associated with the teaching itself, such as the teaching strategies adopted by some of the teachers, which will be discussed in this chapter.

## 4.1 Qualifications and professional training of teachers

The qualifications of the six teachers differed quite substantially, from Grade 8 to a university degree. Teacher 4 was educated up to grade 8; teachers 2 and 6 had a grade 12 certificate;

teacher 1 was qualified in basic education teaching (Basic Education Teacher Diploma and Advanced Certificate in Education), obtained after grade 12; teacher 5 had a Basic Education Teacher Diploma and a Diploma in Education (African Languages) obtained after grade 12; and, the most highly qualified teacher, teacher 3, held a Basic Education Teacher Diploma, Further Diploma in Education and a Bachelor of Education Honours degree. In terms of this research study, three teachers (2, 4 and 6) were not formally trained for the teaching profession, while the other three were professionally qualified teachers. It is not unusual to encounter such varied qualifications at rural Namibian schools (MoE, 2007: 3).

While the qualifications of teachers are not a central concern of this study, it is important to note, however, that unqualified teachers experience a different set of challenges to that of qualified teachers. Not only are unqualified teachers not qualified to teach multigrade classes, but they are also not qualified to teach a class. During the classroom observations I noticed a difference between the qualified and unqualified teachers. The qualified teachers were better equipped to manage a multigrade class than the unqualified teachers. The qualified teachers preceded new lesson presentations by revising the previous one. This allowed learners to recall previous discussions and return to aspects they might not have understood. The revision time facilitated active participation by all the learners. In contrast, the unqualified teachers did not spend any time on revising any previous work, and immediately commenced with new work. The lesson presentations of the unqualified teachers started with writing the topic of the new lesson on the chalkboard, followed by questions on the same topic. Because the topic was new to the learners, the classroom participation also was very low.

While the Namibian Ministry of Education (2011a: 13) acknowledges that 40% of Namibian schools – both in rural and urban settings – contain multigrade classes, there has been no serious attempt to ensure that national teacher education institutions provide professional training for multigrade teaching. All teaching graduates are trained only as monograde teachers, and those who end up at multigrade schools have to adapt to these settings. In an attempt to alleviate the burden of teachers who find themselves practising as multigrade teachers, the Ministry of

Education, through the National Institute for Education Development, established a committee that developed an annual practical training workshop for teachers of multigrade classes in 2007. The training entails a one-week training workshop and provides a manual, focusing on: definition of multigrade teaching, the rationale for multigrade teaching, multigrade organisational options/approaches, time allocation and timetabling, teaching and learning strategies, classroom organisation and management, advantages and challenges of multigrade teaching, lesson planning and preparation, experiences and challenges in multigrade settings, solutions and recommendations for multigrade settings, and assessment in multigrade teaching. Given a host of logistical reasons, including the remoteness of rural schools, only a limited number of teachers manage to attend this training workshop. Two of the teachers in my research (33%) had attended the one-week workshop organised by the Ministry of Education. According to these two teachers (three and five), the workshop was not as effective as they had hoped it would be because of the huge amount of content that needed to be covered in the very limited timeframe of one week. These two teachers were of the opinion that, had they received more adequate training, they would be better equipped to manage multigrade classrooms. During the interview, the teachers expressed their ideas on how multigrade teaching could be managed in Namibia. The teachers' responses to the needs of multigrade teachers are summarised below:

*Teacher 1*: *"Teachers should be trained for multigrade teaching for a period of one to two years."*

*Teacher 2: "The government should introduce training for multigrade teachers who specialise in multigrade teaching and also train advisory teachers who specialise in multigrade teaching; otherwise if it goes like this, we will not do well in our classes."*

*Teacher 3: "We need to be trained, but not workshops of one week, because there are a lot of challenges of multigrade teaching."*

*Teacher 4: "Teachers of multigrade teaching should be fully trained, we do ot support one to two weeks' workshop, and rather we should be trained for one to two years. We need people who could train us, training that is very intensive for a period of one to three years."*

*Teacher 5: "Teachers responsible for multigrade teaching should be trained professionally in order to get the knowledge and skills. I am suggesting that the training should be two to three years long. All teachers responsible for multigrade teaching need proper training. Training of multigrade teachers is extremely important to manage multigrade teaching."*

*Teacher 6: "Training of teachers in multigrade teaching will be better and beneficial to learners. We need three to four years' training for multigrade teaching in order to obtain diplomas and degrees."*

The teachers suggested that it was necessary for the Ministry of Education to appoint an advisory multigrade teacher at the regional level who can offer support and guidance to teachers of multigrade classes. In the Namibian context, an advisory teacher is a person who is knowledgeable in a particular subject and whose role is to assist teachers with their classroom practice through classroom observations, lesson presentation and organised subject workshops. The advisory teacher, in conjunction with school principals, identifies teachers who need such teaching support and then proceeds to make scheduled visits to the schools concerned (as frequently as once a month per school) to render his/her services to the identified teachers. Currently, teachers of multigrade classes are expected to address and manage the challenges associated with a multigrade setting on their own. This is unlike the situation in Finland, for example, where teaching graduates already have a good appreciation of multigrade teaching by the time they are in the class (Brown 2010: 55). The Namibian situation is also unlike the one in Sri Lanka, where student teachers are exposed to the concept of multigrade teaching as a generic

training programme, as well as the learning and teaching of mathematics in multigrade or multilevel settings (Vithanapathirana 2006: 1).

In this section the qualifications and training needs of the teachers were presented. Looking at the teachers' qualifications and training, there was a vast difference in their levels of training, with the lowest being secondary school and the highest being a degree. Despite the apparent differences in educational qualifications, the call for professional multigrade education was a recurring theme across the board. This would imply that even highly trained monograde teachers are not very comfortable in multigrade situations.

## 4.2 Teachers' understanding of multigrade teaching

In essence, multigrade teaching involves a teacher having to teach more than one grade at the same time in one classroom. In terms of this study, the teachers were expected to teach two consecutive grades. During the interview, the six teachers revealed that they had a similar understanding of multigrade teaching, as their responses were as follows:

> *Teacher 1: "My understanding about multigrade teaching is when a teacher teaches different grades in one classroom."*

> *Teacher 2: "My understanding of multigrade teaching is the two grades are combined to teach them at the same time."*

> *Teacher 3: "It is a situation in which one teacher teaches many grades, all at once."*

> *Teacher 4: "Multigrade teaching means that combining two grades to be taught by one teacher in one classroom."*

*Teacher 5: "My understanding of multigrade teaching is when a teacher is teaching two levels, which are combined class for example grades one and two."*

*Teacher 6: "Multigrade teaching is when you are teaching combined grades in one class for example grades one and two in the same class."*

The Ministry of Education in Namibia, understands multigrade teaching as one teacher teaching more than one grade in one classroom (MoE 2007: 11). Although the six teachers were in one accord of the above mentioned aspect, they had different opinions on whether multigrade teaching offered any learning opportunities. Their responses were as follows:

*Teacher 1: "There are no opportunities in multigrade teaching, only the challenges."*

*Teacher 2: "I do not think that there are opportunities of multigrade teaching, there are no opportunities."*

*Teacher 3: "Learners are doing their school works in two years, because they are taught in one class."*

*Teacher 4: "There no opportunities, only challenges."*

*Teacher 5: "Sometimes, learners in the multigrade classes are very few which enable a teacher to give them attention to all of them."*

*Teacher 6: "Multigrade teaching offers opportunities such as for teachers; they are gaining teaching experiences of teaching two grades at the same time,*

> *while for learners the lower grades are exposed to the work of their next grade which makes [for] the mastering of the work."*

The understandings of multigrade teaching by the teachers differ significantly from those discussed in Chapter 2. This confirms Joubert's (2010: 58) contention that part of the challenge of multigrade teaching is that understandings thereof are not shared internationally. In Greece, for example, the grade is attached to the number of teachers employed at the school (Brown, 2010: 7). This means that a school that offers education from grades 1 to 5, and taught by one teacher, is called a monograde school. If the school has two teachers, then is called a two-grade school (Brown, 2010: 7). As in Namibia, multigrade teaching in South Africa is understood as the teaching mode in which one teacher teaches more than one grade at the same time in one classroom (CEPD, 2011: 4). While this specific study looked only at multigrade teaching as related to the teaching of two grades in one classroom, it is not unusual for teachers in Namibia, particularly in rural settings, to teach up to four grades in one classroom (MoE, 2011b: 8). While the teachers in the research differed in their understandings of multigrade teaching, they were in agreement about the lack of opportunities available in multigrade teaching. To them, multigrade teaching presents only challenges. Again, their views differed from the viewpoints expressed in Chapter 2 – that despite the shortcomings of multigrade teaching, it has its benefits and advantages. These include expansion of access to education, academic achievements by learners, social benefits and personal effects, and psychological benefits (Vinjevold & Schindler, 1997: 8). In addition, multigrade teaching plays a crucial role in providing education for all and in the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals, which are aiming to fight poverty through education (Little, 2006a: 7). Three teachers (3, 5 and 6) had similar view of the learning opportunities offered by multigrade teaching as those identified by Berry (Little, 2006a: 41-42): reduced direct instruction, access to curriculum, learn to learn, effects of peer instructions and impact on small group instruction.

## 4.3 Classroom observations

In terms of the research schools, teachers 1, 4 and 6 were responsible for teaching grade 1 and 2, while teachers 2, 3 and 5 were responsible for teaching grades 3 and 4 in their respective schools. The ratio of learners to teachers in the multigrade classrooms was as follows: School A - 29 learners (grades 1 and 2) and 31 learners (grades 3 and 4); School B - 22 learners (grades 1 and 2) and 13 learners (grades 3 and 4); and School C - 9 learners grades (1 and 2) and 12 learners (grades 3 and 4).

During the classroom observations I observed the following lesson presentations by the six teachers: Rumanyo (first language), English (second language), Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Religious and Moral Education, Arts and Physical Education. Apart from Physical Education, which was done outside the classroom (sport field), all the other subjects were taught in the classroom. I observed that every lesson was followed by classroom activities. This was especially important as it gave the teachers an opportunity to ensure that all the learners had understood the work, as well as the chance for learners to master basic competencies. It was also observed that, while the learners showed the greatest enthusiasm during Physical Education, they found the English lessons very challenging and barely participated. During my classroom observations it became evident that the teachers (1, 2, 3, 5 and 6) provided appropriate and sufficient learner activities after the lesson presentation. The learners wrote individual classroom activities in their exercise books and submitted them at the end of each lesson. I noted that most of the classroom activities were marked later in the day, so that the learners received feedback when they met the teachers at the next time of class. In contrast, teacher 4, who was responsible for grades 1 and 2 at School B, had a different classroom practice with regard to classroom activities. The learners were given insufficient class activities, because in most cases the learners were encouraged to come forward and write the answers on the chalkboard.

Overall, the six teachers struggled to maintain an equitable time allocation for the two respective grades in their classrooms. It became evident during my observations that, in grades 1 and 2

classrooms, the teachers tended to focus more on the grade ones. In the classrooms that catered for grades 3 and 4, the teachers focused more on the grade 4 learners. The same situation presented itself across the three schools. One teacher (4) postulated that the reason might be that, in the case of first graders, the teacher wanted them to grasp the basics of reading and writing as quickly as possible and hence focused more on them. In the case of the grade 4 learners, the teachers might be more inclined to focus their attention on them, given the fact that grade 4 is the final year of the lower primary phase. Teachers therefore might feel pressurised to ensure that grade 4 learners have mastered the knowledge and skills required in the lower primary phase so that they are prepared for the senior primary phase.

As the number of learners was quite low in each classroom, the teachers were able to control their classes and maintain a learning environment conducive to learning. While all the learners were encouraged to participate in classroom activities, I observed that the higher grades dominated the class discussions. For example, in the classroom of grades 1 and 2, the grade 2 learners were more active compared to the grade 1s; the same applied to the classrooms of grades 3 and 4. However, I also noticed that some learners in the lower grades were very active during lesson activities – responding to questions that were meant for learners in the higher grade. As I mentioned previously, learner participation during the English class was particularly subdued, with some of the learners responding in the mother tongue. As a result, most of the teachers translated English to the mother tongue first, before switching the context back to English.

## 4.4 Challenges of teachers in a multigrade classrooms

The six teachers reported that they faced numerous and diverse challenges in multigrade classrooms and generally were in agreement that there were far too many challenges for them to be addressed during a single interview. The following challenges were cited by all the teachers: classroom and time management, lack of learning materials, lack of teaching support, lack of multigrade curriculum, and the use of temporary structures in lieu of classrooms.

During the classroom observations I noted that there was a shortage of learning materials, such as textbooks, posters and games, at all schools, which made it challenging for teachers to teach subjects adequately or to demonstrate certain activities. For example, teacher 5 tried to explain the tools used to catch fish in the Kavango River, taking into account that these learners were not familiar with either the river or fish because of the context in which they live. The learners lived and grew up inland, and had never seen a river. It became apparent that having access to pictures or other resources would have assisted this teacher and his/her learners in this lesson. The shortage of textbooks meant that learners needed to share. For example, grade 2 learners at School A shared a textbook on Environmental Studies, three learners at School B shared one English textbook, and at School C three grade 4 learners shared one textbook for Rumanyo. Other learning materials, such as posters, were scarce, and I observed only one poster used by teacher 1 of School A during a lesson on Environmental Studies. However, I also observed teachers who were more innovative with regard to learning materials: for example, teachers 1, 2 and 6 used concrete stones during Mathematics lessons to illustrate addition and subtraction. I noted that the learners got their answers correct by using the stones.

The lack of teaching support was one of the major challenges faced by the teachers at the three multigrade schools. Currently there is no provision of advisory services to multigrade teachers throughout Namibia. During the course of my research it came to my attention that the Ministry of Education had since appointed one member of staff at the national level, referred to as a ‘coordinator of multigrade teaching’ (MoE, 2011b: 5). This national coordinator has the responsibility for coordinating the activities of multigrade schools through workshops. The teachers, however, reported that, apart from the multigrade training workshops, they were not receiving sufficient teaching support at the regional level. As a result, teachers of multigrade classes are trying to manage multigrade classes on their own. Since one of every two members of staff also is the principal, these principals-cum-teachers cannot support the other teachers in their day-to-day work, because they are also responsible for teaching their own multigrade classes. In addition, they sounded hesitant to discuss multigrade teaching because they felt ill-equipped to do so.

When the teachers (1, 2, 4 and 6) were probed as to how they were managing multigrade teaching without any teaching support, their responses were:

> *Teacher 1: "I do not manage; I use revision and compensatory teaching for slow learners to cope."*
>
> *Teacher 2: "I am just trying to use some strategies."*
>
> *Teacher 4: "We are just managing on our own; there is nothing else to do."*
>
> *Teacher 6: "I am just managing on my own."*

According to the teachers, the absence of a national multigrade curriculum for multigrade classes is one of the biggest challenges facing teachers of multigrade classes. Currently, in all lower primary (grades 1 to 4) schools in Namibia, the whole setting of teaching and learning is planned, organised and implemented according to the monograde curriculum. The teachers were of the view that if there was a multigrade curriculum in place, issues related to timetabling and time allocation could be addressed better. Time management was observed during this research to be one of the biggest challenges in multigrade classrooms. According to the teaching timetables, the duration of each period is supposed to be forty minutes. Currently, the time allocation for multigrade classes is the same as for monograde classes. All the schools are following the curriculum and timetable of a monograde school. I observed that three of the teachers (2, 4 and 5) went beyond the forty minutes as allocated per lesson in order to create more time for teaching the subject to two grades. This had serious consequences for the rest of the subjects on the timetable – such as certain subjects not being allocated their requisite teaching time, and certain subjects not being taught at all. However, the adherence to the time allocated for breaks was strict and in all cases could not be extended or altered. I observed that

the teachers had problems utilising the time in multigrade classes. The following were some of the comments from the teachers regarding time allocation:

> *Teacher 2: "Not having enough time is affecting teaching and learning, as there is no time to assist 'slow learners'."*

> *Teacher 3: "Time is never enough as two or more grades are taught at the same time and it is difficult to ensure quality of learning."*

The abovementioned classroom challenges were prevalent at all the schools. However, School B had additional classroom challenges, such as no permanent classrooms, shortages of desks and a shortage of clean water. Teachers at this school used a tent, hut and tree as classrooms. Schools A and C had permanent classroom structures. On a more positive note, the construction of permanent classes at school B was in progress at the time of the research.

I discovered that teaching and learning at School B could not be managed optimally due to the temporary structures. The temporary structures utilised as classrooms had various shortcomings. The tent, for example, was the classroom for teacher 4. The tent was utilised from 7 to 10 o'clock in the morning on sunny days, after which it would become extremely hot so that both teacher and learners were sweating, resulting in the abandonment of the tent in favour of the shade of a tree. It took ten to fifteen minutes to organise this changeover. While under the tree, extra challenges would crop up, such as learners' being distracted by natural outdoor activities like the movement of people, animals and motorised vehicles. In such cases, the learners would not pay full attention to the teacher.

The second challenge was that, if the chalkboard was not securely propped, it would constantly be blown over by the wind. Thirdly, the class under the tree was interrupted several times by rain in the late afternoon. When it rained, the teacher and learners returned to the tent, in which they could hardly hear each other due to the noise caused by the raindrops. I witnessed the classroom

being absolutely quiet, listening only to the beats of the drops of rain. The pictures below (Fig. 4.1) show the tent and the tree used as a classroom. In addition to challenges encountered in the teaching of multigrade classes, teachers and learners also had to contend with highly problematic contextual challenges emanated from the temporary structures of classrooms, as displayed in the pictures.

Figure 4.1 A tent used as a classroom (*Left*), Grade 1 and 2 learners in the tent (*Centre*) and under a tree (*Right*) during lessons at school B.

Teacher 3 of School B operated in a hut as a classroom for grades 3 and 4 learners. The hut had its own structural defects/shortcomings that affected teaching and learning. It was a mud structure and not constructed ideally for teaching and learning; from the top, water could drip into the classroom during rainy weather. In addition, one of the sheets of corrugated iron had been lifted by the wind, resulting in both rain and sunshine coming through. On sunny days the learners had to shift often from one place to another to shield them from the scorching sunshine. In so doing, the class was constantly interrupted because of the noise from the continuous movement of chairs and desks. On the other weather extreme (rain), teaching and learning would cease for lengthy periods as both the teacher and the learners moved from rain-soaked portions to the drier parts of the hut, resulting in severe crowding and possible damage to furniture and books. In other words, on rainy days, teaching and learning was nearly impossible. I witnessed that it also was noisy inside the hut when it was raining because there was no ceiling under corrugated iron. The noise caused by the drops of rain significantly affected the communication between the teacher and the learners in the classroom. The temporary structures of classrooms at School B negatively affected the teaching and learning of the school. The shortage of learners'

desks was another challenge affecting teachers in School B. Consequently, the learners were expected either to share desks, or to stand during class. This meant that they could not write properly during classroom activities since they had to place the exercise books on their thighs. The shortage of learners' desks is demonstrated clearly in Figure 4.1 in the picture showing the grade 1 and 2 learners seated in the classroom.

## 4.5 Teaching strategies adopted by teachers of multigrade classes

Teaching strategies refer to approaches a teacher employs to deliver lessons to learners. I observed that the learners enjoyed singing songs with their teachers about what they had learnt in the classrooms. The learners sang two or three songs at the beginning of each subject before the lesson was delivered. In most cases I noticed that all the learners and their teachers stood up to sing educational songs about the letters of the alphabet, parts of the human body and numbers. During singing time, most of the learners were excited and motivated to learn. Afterwards, in most cases the teacher asked some of the learners if they could still recall the previous topic in a specific subject.

During the classroom observations I noted that three of the teachers (2, 4 and 5) used a 'quasi' monograde teaching strategy. It is a teaching strategy whereby a teacher teaches one grade at a time while the other grade is idle (CEDP, 2011: 65). Afterwards, the teacher provides individual class activities that evaluate whether the learners have mastered specific basic competencies. However, this teaching strategy was time-consuming and required a lot of effort from the teachers. Besides being time-consuming, it meant that learners who were not being taught were expected to merely sit still.

In contrast, three of the teachers (1, 3 and 6) used a differentiated teaching strategy, whereby the teacher presented one lesson with the same general topic or theme to all grades at the same time. This teaching strategy saves time; however, it was noted that teachers took into consideration the basic competencies of one grade at a time, disadvantaging the other grade. For example, if a

teacher presented a lesson in a classroom of grades 3 and 4 and focused on the competencies of the grade 4 learners, the grade 3 learners found the learning content to be more difficult. Teacher 3 provided the same written classroom activities for both grade 3 and 4 learners. The grade 3 learners worked out the first five activities while the grade 4 learners answered all, for example from numbers 1 to 10. What was interesting about the practice was that some of the brighter grade 3 learners completed all class activities along with their grade 4 classmates.

My finding was that the teachers did not utilise a variety of teaching strategies. In all the classrooms the teachers employed two types of teaching strategies only, namely a 'quasi' monograde teaching strategy and a differentiated teaching strategy. Ten teaching strategies are identified in the Ministry workshop manual: group work, demonstration, observation, drama, role-play, and project approach, peer teaching, debate and quiz. However, the teachers did not use any of these teaching strategies, possibly due to a lack of knowledge and skills. Similarly, a study conducted in South Africa on teaching literacy and numeracy in multigrade classes in rural and farm schools found that most multigrade teachers were using the quasi monograde teaching strategy, which they too viewed as time-consuming (CEPD, 2011: 65).

While not directly linked to either the interviews or the classroom observation, it became clear during my time at the schools that it was nearly impossible for teaching and learning to take place at these schools if one teacher was absent from school. In short, the available teacher could not manage to teach all four grades at the same time in one classroom. This observation was made when teacher 3 of School B was absent from school for two days. The available teacher (4) then gathered all the learners of four grades into one class. I was keen to see whether the lesson presentation could benefit all of the grades at the same time. As the learners were waiting upon the teacher, who was sitting in front of the class going through a textbook, the learners started becoming noisy and the teacher tried to silence them. The learners kept quiet initially, but this lasted for only for a few minutes, after which they became noisy again. The teacher then asked the whole class to stand and sing a song. The learners did so hesitantly, but with the teacher leading, eventually they sang until the end of the school day.

On the second day, the teacher separated the learners according to their original classes – grades 1 and 2 on their own and grades 3 and 4 on their own. The teacher gave some class activities to grades 3 and 4 and then went to the class of the grade 1 and 2 learners. After a while the class captain of the grade 3 and 4 class reported fighting in the classroom. As a result the teacher instructed the grade 3 and 4 learners to join grades 1 and 2 again. When all the learners of the four grades came together, the same routine of the previous day almost repeated itself.

In this chapter I presented and discussed the research findings constructed through interviews and classroom observations. The study found that all the teachers were not professionally trained as multigrade teachers. In addition, I discovered that the teachers found it quite challenging to manage multigrade classes efficiently and effectively. However, they were trying to provide appropriate and sufficient classroom activities for the learners. There was a lack of teaching support for the teachers at the schools. It was found during the research that the teachers lacked various teaching strategies, as referred to above.

# Chapter 5

# Conclusion

This chapter offers the conclusion of the study, which was undertaken to investigate multigrade teaching at three rural primary schools in the Kavango region in Namibia. The study focused on the challenges facing teachers and the teaching strategies adopted by teachers in multigrade classrooms. The chapter is divided into three parts: summary of the main findings, conclusion, and recommendations for possible future research.

## 5.1 Summary of the main findings

The study found that teachers in multigrade classrooms experience numerous and diverse challenges, ranging from problems in managing a classroom consisting of two grades, time management in terms of trying to adapt a timetable designed for a monograde classroom to that of a multigrade classroom, and a shortage of learning materials, to the absence of a multigrade curriculum, and a serious lack of training and support in multigrade teaching. As discussed, these challenges hold serious implications for teaching, and are exacerbated by the fact that teachers in the study are not equipped to manage a multigrade classroom, and three of the six teachers are unqualified to teach. As observed and as shared by the teachers, they are ill-prepared, frustrated and demoralised in their current classroom situations and, in the absence of any direction from the Ministry of Education, approach each day as it comes. Like the implications for teaching, the implications for learning are equally problematic and reason for serious concern. Depending on the grade on which the teacher focuses – such as the teacher focusing on grade 1 exclusively – learners are left feeling bored and ill-prepared in the classroom. Consequently, the six teachers in the study reported high failure rates, and equally high drop-out rates.

The high failure rates and drop-out rates may have further implications for the living conditions in the community in particular, and the country in general. The percentages of illiteracy and

unemployment will be on the increase, resulting in people not able to make a meaningful contribution to the country. This may lead to substantial dependence on international expertise because local people lack the necessary knowledge and skills for the further development of the country. In some instances, the high failure rate and drop-out rate results in undesirable activities, such as theft, and other social evils, which lead to the destruction of communities and the society. Therefore it is of cardinal importance to ensure that teachers are supported to execute their professional duties successfully. One of the best ways to support teachers of multigrade classes, in my view, is through professional training, because they will be well equipped with the knowledge and skills required to manage multigrade classes at their respective schools. Well-trained teachers will apply their professional judgement to how best to handle teaching and learning inside the classrooms, without resorting to breaching the acts and regulations of the Ministry of Education.

In addition, it was discovered that the teachers lacked teaching strategies. In all six classrooms observed, the teachers used only two teaching strategies for lesson presentations, namely a quasi monograde teaching strategy – a teacher teaches one grade at a time, and a differentiated teaching strategy – or, teaches the same general topic/theme to all grades at the same time. As the Ministry of Education (2007: 41) explains, the importance of a teaching strategy is that it is a process of guiding and enabling an individual to learn new ideas and skills and to develop new values and attitudes. Taking into account that learners are different individuals, it therefore is imperative for teachers to apply various teaching strategies in order to obtain the full attention of different learners for them to participate fully during the lesson presentation. The teachers of multigrade classes could adopt some teaching strategies, such as group work, demonstration, drama, peer teaching, debate, quiz and so on, to provide in the learning needs of the learners.

The lack of teaching strategies may have implications for learning, such as lesson presentation that becomes boring, leading to a loss of interest and school dropout. Some learners may drop out of school because of a teacher who could not assist them in the classroom to realise their full

potential. Thus, professionally trained teachers should employ different teaching strategies to ensure that learners are active in participating and engaging in the learning process.

## 5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion it is important to reflect on whether the study has addressed the research questions, which relate to the challenges of teachers in multigrade classrooms and the teaching strategies adopted by teachers of multigrade classes. The questions were addressed through an exploration of the literature from both a global and local perspective. While there are numerous and diverse understandings of multigrade classrooms and teaching across the world, the common understanding of a multigrade classroom in Namibia is that of a teaching mode in which a single teacher teaches more than one grade at the same time in one classroom. And, while teachers in other parts of the world might be trained and qualified as multigrade teachers, this is not the case in Namibia. Even though up to 40% of schools in Namibia are in fact multigrade (MoE 2011a: 13), the University of Namibia does not offer any formal training or qualification. As discussed, the only training available is the one-week workshop organised by the Ministry of Education at the national level. This programme is inadequate to address the needs of multi-grade teaching, and is only available to a limited number of teachers, which invariably excludes teachers at remote rural schools – as was the case with the six teachers in this research.

The comparison between the literature on multigrade teaching and the research revealed interesting discrepancies. For instance, Berry (Little, 2006a: 41-42) explains that learners in multigrade classes are grouped and assigned to carry out class activities under the supervision of the teacher. In other words, the learners in a multigrade classroom receive less direct instruction from the teacher. But during my research it became evident that learners were taught as if they were in a monograde classroom – which often meant that the teacher focused on one grade only while neglecting the other. Secondly, Berry (Little, 2006a: 41-42) explains further that learners in multigrade classes use self-instructional and self-learning materials in schools. The research

revealed that none of the three schools had any learning materials, least of all the materials necessary for a multigrade classroom.

Thus, the professional training of teachers of multigrade classes comes to the fore. As the Ministry of Education and Culture (1993: 75) argues, the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of our schools depends to a large extent on the nature and success of our teacher education programmes. These programmes are supposed to strike a balance between training teachers for monograde and multigrade teaching. This has not yet been realised, as the institutions of higher learning, as indicated previously, still use teacher training programmes that focus mainly on the monograde setting, leaving the teachers of multigrade classes to learn through practice, which has implications for teaching and learning. The learners who are currently taught by teachers who are learning about multigrade teaching through practise also end up in the mainstream of our education system. At that stage, teachers try to give them more academic attention when they reach grades 10 and 12 respectively, yet it does not seem to be effective because the root cause of the problem is the academic background of the learners. Therefore, in order to redress the matter, there is an urgent need to lay strong foundations for our education system, which should start with lower primary phase, taking into consideration the professional training of teachers to ensure that learners are well prepared for their educational life.

Professionally trained teachers are supposed to guide learners through a self-discovery learning process and the construction of knowledge and skills through peer interaction in the classroom. Professionally trained teachers, firstly, could assign learners to carry out some classroom activities that would guide learners step by step with less involvement by the teacher. Secondly, the trained teachers could make use of learner group work as one of the teaching strategies; in groups, learners engage with each other as a learning process. Taking into account that the learners at the three schools were in the early ages of their schooling, they would learn best when they are playing. In other words, teachers could identify some teaching strategies of learning through playing. This was not witnessed in all the six classrooms during the research.

Moreover, professionally trained teachers would know what learning materials are needed for multigrade teaching, for example the self-instructional and self-learning materials that enable the teacher to work with some learners while others are engaged in individual or group tasks (CEPD, 2011: 66). The six teachers in this study were not even aware of such learning materials because they are not trained professionally as multigrade teachers. These teachers were fully aware of monograde teaching, in which some of them were professionally trained. Thus, the study holds the view that the professional training of multigrade teachers should be introduced as a specialised field in education for prospective student teachers in Namibia, because they will make a great difference in the life of learners by providing proper learning guidance in multigrade classes.

## 5.3 Recommendations

Teachers have been expected to teach in multigrade classrooms in Namibia since the introduction of formal education. While there is a full recognition of the existence of multigrade classrooms (MBEC, 1996: 27) as one of the teaching norms, no provision has been made as yet for the professional training of teachers of multigrade classes. In the light of the absence of professional training and qualifications for teachers, their on-going challenges in managing and teaching multigrade classes, and the serious implications for learners and learning at these schools, the study would like to make the following recommendations:

### 5.3.1 Recommendations to the Ministry of Education

- Appoint advisory teachers for each region to offer teaching support to teachers of multigrade classes.
- Provide appropriate and sufficient teaching and learning materials, such as self-instructional and self-learning materials, to schools offering multigrade teaching.
- In acknowledging that the introduction of professional training will take time, and that the current teachers in multigrade classrooms are in dire need of support, the study would also

like to recommend support from regional offices in the form of specialist advisers. There are numerous teachers in multigrade classrooms – many of whom will never receive any formal training. These teachers require immediate and on-going support if the Ministry of Education hopes to provides quality teaching and learning to learners.

### 5.3.2 Recommendations to teachers of multigrade classes

- Be creative and innovative in designing your own learning materials. Use local materials, such as stones, sticks, seeds, planks and ropes, which also are familiar to the learners.
- Adapt the existing school timetable to accommodate a multigrade classroom. This therefore might involve lengthening the teaching periods, even if it means teaching fewer lessons per day. The important thing is to focus on teaching a particular subject properly, rather than merely getting through a set number of subjects per day.
- Consult and co-plan lessons with others teachers at your school. Focus on themes so that the workload can be shared, and so that teachers do not work in isolation.

In conclusion, the study, firstly, serves as an once-in-a-lifetime experience for me as a novice researcher. It moves me one step forward in my personal life as a trainee researcher. I learnt that each chapter of the study is unique, requiring a different approach to presentation. In the process, academic writing posed a challenge because it has its own writing norms. Secondly, the study gave me a personal understanding of multigrade teaching from the global to local perspective. As a teacher with specialist subject knowledge it broadens my insight into multigrade teaching as a global phenomenon that serves a policy to provide access to education to communities with sparse populations.

Thirdly, I discovered that there is no single study that addresses various aspects in one volume; thus this study is an attempt to understand the challenges facing teachers and the teaching strategies adopted by teachers in multigrade classes. Therefore, it might be useful to researchers

who try to understand multigrade teaching in Namibia, with specific reference to the Kavango region. The study, being the first of its kind in the region, might serve as a point of reference for other researchers. Finally, the study might be beneficial to policymakers in formulating policy for multigrade schools in Namibia.

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# Addendum A

## Demographic data

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Teacher No: _____School (A, B or C):_____

Date: _____Grade:_____

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Kindly provide the following information:

1. Gender:

2. Home language:

3. Highest qualifications:

4. Training level specialisation:

5. Subject specialisation:

6. Qualifications for multigrade teaching:

7. Years of teaching experience:

8. Years of teaching experience in a multigrade classroom:

9. Years of teaching at this school:

# Addendum B

## Structured interview schedule: multigrade teaching

Teacher No: _____ School (A, B or C):_____

Date: _____Grade:_____

1. Briefly, explain your understanding of multigrade teaching?

2. How many grades are you teaching in one classroom? Is this consistent or does it vary annually?

3. What is your medium of instruction?

4. How do you teach the multigrade classroom?

5. In your own opinion, what are the challenges of teachers in the multigrade classroom?

6. How do these challenges mentioned in the question above affect the teaching and learning?

7. Is there a specific curriculum for multigrade teaching? If not, which curriculum are you using?

8. Are you receiving any support for multigrade teaching?

(a) If not, how are you managing?

(b) If yes, what types of support?

9. What types of support do you think multigrade teachers might need?

10. What are the opportunities for multigrade teaching?

11. What is necessary for the cultivation of effective multigrade schooling in a rural setting?

# Addendum C

## Classroom observation sheet

Teacher No: _____ School (A, B or C):_____

Date: _____ Grades combined: _____

Subject: _____ Topic: _____

Period: _____ Duration: _____ No of learners: _____

Keys for rating: 1 = weak; 2 = better; 3 = good; 4 = very good; 5 = excellent

| No. | Themes | Ratings | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1 | The teacher introduced the lesson, getting the attention of the learners | | | | | |
| 2 | The teacher communicated clearly with the learners | | | | | |
| 3 | The teacher paid attention to both grades at the same time | | | | | |
| 4 | The teacher managed the time effectively for both grades | | | | | |
| 5 | The teacher used various teaching/learning aids | | | | | |
| 6 | The teacher engaged the learners during lesson presentation | | | | | |
| 7 | The teacher used various teaching strategies/approaches | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | The teacher monitored the learners' work during the lesson delivery | | | | | |
| 9 | The teacher coordinated both grades in the class effectively | | | | | |
| 10 | There were challenges for teaching/learning during the lesson | | | | | |
| 11 | There were learning opportunities for learners during the lesson | | | | | |
| 12 | Arrangement of desks/chairs supported the teaching approach | | | | | |
| 13 | There was a favourable atmosphere for teaching and learning | | | | | |
| 14 | The "slow learners" were given chances to do some activities | | | | | |
| 15 | The "slow learners" were assisted during the lesson delivery | | | | | |
| 16 | The "fast learners" were given challenging extra work | | | | | |
| 17 | Learners were at liberty to ask questions where necessary | | | | | |
| 18 | Learners participated actively in the lesson delivery | | | | | |
| 19 | The class activities were well prepared in advance by the teacher | | | | | |
| 20 | There are various teaching/learning aids displayed on the wall | | | | | |
| 21 | The teacher gave individual class activities appropriately | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 22 | The teacher gave group class activities appropriately | | | | | |
| 23 | The instructions to the learners were communicated clearly | | | | | |
| 24 | There were sufficient and appropriate class activities provided for both grades | | | | | |
| Total | | | | | | |

Comments:……

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# Ethical clearance

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
KAVANGO REGIONAL COUNCIL

DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION

Tel. (066) 258 9111
Fax (066) ...2589213/2589320/258 9222
Private Bag 2134
RUNDU

Enquiries: **Alfons M. Dikuua**

Our Ref.:

Date : 10 September 2013

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERNED**

**SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT EDUCATION RESEARCH AT THREE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NCUNCUNI CIRCUIT, IN KAVANGO REGION**

1. Kindly be informed that permission is hereby granted to Mr. S.S. Haingura, a full-time master student at Stellenbosch University to conduct education research at three lower primary schools in Ncuncuni Circuit .

2. Your cooperation and support in this regard is highly appreciated and valued.

Your sincerely,

Alfons M. Dikuua
DIRECTOR

KAVANGO REGIONAL COUNCIL DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION 2013 -09- 10 DIRECTOR PRIVATE BAG 2134 RUNDU

18/09/2013
Date

Cc. Inspector of Education – Ncuncuni Circuit

All official correspondence must be addressed to the Chief Regional Officer

**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**
**KAVANGO REGIONAL COUNCIL**
**DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION**
**NCUNCUNI CIRCUIT OFFICE**
PRIVATE BAG 2134, RUNDU, NAMIBIA

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|---|---|---|---|
| Enquiries: | S.M. Hausiku | Telephone No.: | 066 256064 / 0608016759 |
| Email: | hscholastika@mighty.co.za | Fax No.: | +264-66-258 9213/2589320 |
| Ref. No.: | | | |

16 September 2013

To: Principals within Ncuncunci Circuit

**RE: PERMISON TO CONDUCT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**

In my capacity as an inspector of education of Ncuncuni circuit, I would like to ask for fully Co-operation and support to Mr. S.S Haingura (masters student at Stellenbosch University) who will conduct an educational research in your schools.

Educational research is one way of finding out where the educational system needs to iron for the benefit of education stakeholders and on this case, learners whom we prepared for the future. Therefore, principals must also share this message with the school board members for their information regarding this exercise that it will not disturb any school programs.

Yours sincerely
Mrs Hausiku S.M
Inspector of education

Cc Haingura S.S (Masters Student)

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
NCUNCUNI CIRCUIT
16 SEP 2013
P/BAG 2134, RUNDU
REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA