Concept Note

Multi-country Research on Multigrade Teaching in Asia-Pacific: Regional Dissemination Workshop

23-25 March 2015
Radisson Blu Plaza Bangkok, Sukhumvit Road, Bangkok, Thailand

Background

Rising economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region has created momentum for education development with more than two-thirds of the countries in the region registering net enrolment rates of 90% or more. Many countries have national programmes to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals and education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. However, many quality and access related challenges remain. One particular challenge for most countries is how to meet the educational needs of rural populations living in scattered, very thinly populated highlands, mountainous regions and small inhabited islands. These geographic realities combined with demographic and economic factors pose access and quality challenges in education. In these areas, education is often provided through small, under-resourced schools which have low student enrolment and shortage of teachers to cover the required grade levels. Even in urban areas in many parts of the region, public schools are becoming smaller due to changing demographics and parental preferences to send their children to private schools. In this context, multigrade teaching, a teaching of students of different ages, grades and abilities in one classroom by a single teacher, is the approach widely adopted by a number of small schools to provide learning opportunity to disadvantaged and hard-to-reach children.

Teaching in a multigrade classroom is different from teaching in a monograde classroom, particularly in terms of classroom organization, grouping of learners, teaching and learning process, and instructional materials. However, teachers in this region are not well-trained and well-supported to develop their knowledge and skills needed to teach successfully in a multigrade setting. Furthermore, many countries do not have national policies that guide and support the management, administration, financing, curriculum provision, deployment and training of teachers in multigrade schools. As a result, such schools have dismal teaching-learning conditions, contributing to a low quality of student learning.

Since August 2013, UNESCO Bangkok Office has implemented a project entitled “Promoting Quality Education through Enhanced Multigrade Teaching in Asia-Pacific” with support from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The project aims at improving the quality of learning for the poorest and marginalized children living in rural, remote and less populated areas in the region by strengthening national capacity in planning and implementing multigrade teaching.
In 2014, UNESCO Bangkok Office embarked on a multi-country research to examine the current policies and practices concerning multigrade teaching and identify evidence-based policy options for improving the overall quality of multigrade teaching in the Asia-Pacific region. Initially, the project invited five countries; Bangladesh, China, Lao PDR, Nepal and Pakistan; to participate in the multi-country research. Realizing the importance of good quality multigrade teaching, Thailand and Cambodia expressed their interest in participating in the research with financial support from UNICEF Thailand Country Office and UNESCO Phnom Penh Office respectively. Through collaboration with relevant UNESCO Field Offices (in Beijing, Dhaka, Islamabad, Kathmandu and Phnom Penh) as well as UNICEF Thailand Country Office and academic networks, suitable national organizations or universities were identified to carry out the research in seven participating countries.

The multi-country research was completed in January 2015. To disseminate the preliminary research findings and promising practices on multigrade teaching, a regional dissemination workshop will be organized on 23 – 25 March 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand. The workshop will also provide a participatory platform for policy-makers, researchers, educators, and other stakeholders to discuss strategies and directions to enhance multigrade teaching to improve the quality of education in the region. UNESCO Bangkok Office intends to consolidate findings from the different country studies in the form of a regional synthesis report. Subsequently, UNESCO Bangkok Office will develop regional guidelines and an evidence-based policy brief on multigrade teaching to inform policy development and support the implementation of multigrade teaching.

Objectives

The objectives of the workshop are to:

1. Share preliminary research findings including learning experience and promising practices of multigrade teaching from seven participating countries and to provide feedback to the national research teams for refining the reports;
2. Increase awareness on the current situation of multigrade teaching policy and practice in participating countries through newly created research evidence and to advocate for a supportive policy environment for promoting multigrade teaching;
3. Discuss strategies and directions to enhance multigrade teaching to improve the quality of education, which will be used as a basis for preparing regional guidelines and a policy brief on multigrade teaching in Asia-Pacific;
4. Discuss the possibility for establishing a regional network on multigrade teaching in Asia.

Expected results

By the end of the workshop, the following outcomes and outputs are expected:

1. Increased awareness and evidence-based knowledge of policy-makers and researchers on key issues related to multigrade teaching;
2. Solid recommendations on the preliminary research reports;
3. A regional collection of promising practices of multigrade teaching;
4. A regional agenda for advocacy for promoting quality learning through enhanced multigrade teaching.

Workshop modality

Prior to the regional dissemination workshop, the research coordinator or a designated member of each country research team will be asked to prepare a short presentation to share the preliminary research findings, covering key areas of interest of the research.

The workshop will be structured in both plenary sessions and group sessions for thematic discussions. Discussions will be initiated with country presentations on the preliminary research findings. The workshop will also be a platform for policy-makers, researchers, educators, and other stakeholders to discuss strategies and directions to enhance multigrade teaching to improve the quality of education in Asia-Pacific region.

The workshop is expected to generate inputs, which will be used as a basis for the subsequent development of regional guidelines indicating key actions for improving multigrade teaching in all relevant areas of policy and practice. Thematic discussions will focus on (i) Planning, financing and management of multigrade schools, (ii)
Curriculum, pedagogical methods/approaches and learning materials, (iii) Teacher preparation for multigrade teaching, and (iv) Multilingual education in multigrade settings.

Inputs will also be sought for the subsequent development of a policy brief on multigrade teaching that uses the evidence generated by the multi-country research, and discusses policy implications of key findings and addresses key policy issues identified by the research.

**Dates and Venue**

The workshop will be held over three days, from 23 to 25 March 2015, at Radisson Blu Plaza Bangkok on Sukhumvit Road, Bangkok, Thailand.

**Language**

English will be the main language of the workshop with interpretation if/when necessary.

**Participants**

The workshop will bring together approximately 40 participants. From each of the seven participating countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan and Thailand), UNESCO Bangkok Office will invite the research coordinator or a designated member of the country research team, and one high-level policy-maker who works on policy issues related to small/multigrade schools and/or teacher education. Local and international stakeholders in the field of education, in particular multigrade teaching, will also be invited.

Travel expenses of nominated policy-makers and research coordinators or their representative and nominated policy-makers from seven participating countries (air tickets, accommodation and daily subsistence allowance) will be covered by UNESCO Bangkok Office.

**Organization**

The workshop will be organized by UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok Office), with the financial support of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and partial contribution from UNICEF Thailand Country Office.

The workshop will use participatory and reflective approaches, and will be facilitated by resource people from UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF Thailand Country Office, participants and external experts.

**Documents**

The main documents for the workshop will be country research reports from seven participating countries. A link to access the electronic copy of each report online will be shared with confirmed participants prior to the workshop.

**Exhibition**

Participants are encouraged to bring materials related to multigrade teaching that are used in their countries, such as policy documents, publications, teacher training materials, textbooks, and other associated teaching and learning materials. A few display tables will be set up where participants can exhibit samples of materials available in their countries.

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