Concept Note

Regional Research Workshop:

Promoting Quality Learning through Enhanced Multigrade Teaching
in the Asia-Pacific Region

21-23 April 2014, Holiday Inn Bangkok Sukhumvit 22, Thailand

Background

Countries in the Asia and Pacific region have millions of people living in scattered, very thinly populated highlands, mountainous regions and small inhabited islands. These geographic factors combined with demographic and economic factors pose access and quality challenges in education. In these areas, education is often provided through small and incomplete schools which have low student enrolment, scarcity of resources and support, 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 the same group by a single teacher, becomes the only available option for providing education to children.

Available data suggests that multigrade teaching is commonly used in most countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Despite widespread use of multigrade teaching, many countries do not have national policies and suitable pedagogy to guide the implementation of multigrade teaching and learning. Teachers are not properly trained, supported and do not receive training in multigrade teaching methods. Evidence suggests that the international commitment of achieving Universalization of Primary Education (UPE) by 2015 as reflected in the Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will not be realized unless appropriate teaching-learning strategies are adopted to meet the learning needs of such at-risk groups. Moreover, there has been very little documentation on the effectiveness of existing multigrade teaching policies and practices.
In this context, the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education in Bangkok is implementing the “Promoting Quality Learning through Enhanced Multigrade Teaching in the Asia-Pacific Region” project in co-operation with the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The project aims to improve the quality of learning for the poorest and marginalized children living in rural, remote and less populated areas in the Asia-Pacific region by strengthening national capacity in planning and implementing multigrade teaching.

The project initially invited five countries to participate in the country policy research on multigrade teaching: Bangladesh, China, Lao PDR, Nepal and Pakistan. Subsequently, as a result of dialogue with UNICEF Thailand Country Office, Thailand was invited to join in, with support from UNICEF Thailand. In addition, Cambodia was invited to participate in the research with support from UNESCO Phnom Penh Office. This policy research will aim to examine the country’s current policies and practices concerning multigrade teaching in formal and non-formal education settings, as well as to identify evidence-based policy options for improving the overall quality of multigrade teaching. The research will include both desk review of policy documents and fieldwork for data collection. The consolidated findings of this multi-country review will be used to prepare an evidence-based advocacy brief, which will be used for policy advocacy in favor of multigrade teaching.

Before embarking on the research, a regional research workshop will be organized for a small group of national researchers and policy makers from seven participating countries. This regional workshop will provide a participatory platform for the country research teams to learn from one another and to work together to design and develop necessary instruments for the upcoming country research.

Much research suggests that multigrade teaching can be an effective strategy to provide access to education and enhance the quality of learning if handled properly and supported by appropriate policies. With a well-developed knowledge base on multigrade teaching, this project will help explore the policies, curriculum provision, incentives, teacher allocation mechanisms, and teacher education systems/approaches that are effective in supporting multigrade teaching in project countries.

**Objectives**

1. To ensure common understanding among the country research teams regarding the conceptual and methodological aspects of policy research on multigrade teaching within the framework of the “Promoting Quality Learning through Enhanced Multigrade Teaching in the Asia-Pacific Region” project;
2. To raise awareness on the current situation of multigrade teaching in participating countries;
3. To develop data collection instruments ensuring appropriateness and relevance to the country’s context and discuss possible adaptation/contextualization of the regional research framework and protocol;
4. To strengthen capacity of the country research teams in designing and undertaking analytical work on multigrade teaching;
5. To develop country specific work plans for the research process in accordance with the regional research guidelines.

**Expected results**

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

1. A common agreed research framework with possible strategies for adaptation and contextualization;
2. Draft data collection instruments;
3. A country level work plan for the research process;
4. Increased awareness and knowledge of policy-makers and researchers on key issues related to multigrade teaching.
Dates and Venue

The workshop will be held over three days, from 21 to 23 April 2014, at Holiday Inn Bangkok Sukhumvit 22 Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand.

Workshop modality

Prior to the regional research workshop, the representative of each country team will be asked to prepare a short presentation on the status of multigrade teaching in his/her country to be made at the workshop as an input to the development of data collection instruments.

The workshop will be structured in both plenary sessions and breakout working group sessions to address all five aforementioned objectives. Discussions will be initiated with a presentation on the overview of the research project. The organizer will prepare a draft research framework and protocol for countries to review and adapt taking into consideration of their country contexts. A data matrix will also be presented as a guideline for countries to develop research instruments. The workshop is expected to produce data collection instruments, which could be further adapted in countries before being used. At the end of the workshop, each country team will prepare a draft work plan for the entire research process.

Language

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

Participants

The workshop will bring together approximately 20 participants. From each of the seven participating countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan and Thailand), UNESCO Bangkok Office will invite a country team of two people. Each country team will comprise one policy-maker who works on policy issues and one national researcher who will lead the country research team. Local and international stakeholders in the field of multigrade teaching will also be invited.

Travel expenses of international participants (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 thus, it will be facilitated by resource people from UNESCO Bangkok Office, UNICEF Thailand Country Office, participants and external experts.

Reference materials


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News & Event:  
http://goo.gl/LtECyq

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