Analytical Review on the Status of Multigrade Teaching in Nepal

In this section national policy, education documents and research reports are reviewed to position teaching learning practices pertaining to multigrade arrangement in Nepalese schools.

National Policy
There are two important guiding documents in Nepalese school education at present – ‘National Curriculum Framework for School Education in Nepal’ (CDC, 2007) and ‘School Sector Reform Plan 2009-2015’ (MOE, 2009). National Curriculum Framework (NCF) viewed that effective implementation of curriculum depends on the nature of interaction between learners and teachers. Teachers’ role is important in its development and implementation. NCF suggested following for development of teachers for effective implementation of curriculum:

- Competent in subject matter and general knowledge and skills.
- Child-centered and life skill based instruction
- Multilingual and bilingual teaching.
- Basic knowledge of information and communication technology and its use.
- Inclusion of community work, case study and mini-research in teacher education
- Development and use of curriculum and textbooks.
- Creation of child friendly teaching learning environment.
- Selection and use of teaching learning activities.
- Preparation of evaluation tools, analysis of test result and improve them.

Similarly, NCF envisioned enhanced role of schools to develop and implement the curriculum and the curricular materials that should address local needs, access, relevancy and quality. Schools will be given autonomy to conduct the curricular activities corresponding to the global context by linking schools’ physical environment, curriculum, teachers, students and other managerial aspects with the teaching learning. Schools that develop autonomously will be
made capable to run open/distance education and multi-grade teaching and learning activities. For this, the schools will pay special attention to the following aspects:

- Ensure child rights
- Create inclusive educational environment
- Strengthen the relation between parents/guardians and schools
- Ensure the quality of education by creating competitive environment
- Develop educational resource materials
- Adopt information and communication technology
- Adopt participatory working procedures
- Conduct multi grade, subject and classroom teaching
- Provide students counselling service to ensure quality education for all.

School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) has set goal of basic education ‘to ensure equitable access to quality education through a rights-based approach and promotion of a child friendly environment in schools’ and objective as ‘to ensure equitable access to quality basic education for all children in 5-12 age group.’ In this respect some of the illustrative policy directions provided are:

- Introducing mother tongue as a medium of instruction.
- Employing flexible learning approaches to respond to diverse needs and to address learners’ individual pace of learning.
- Implementing continuous assessment and remedial support systems.

SSRP emphasized on ‘ensuring equity and social inclusion’, ‘increase female participation’, ‘code of conduct (to safeguard pro-poor, non-discriminatory, and non-punitive practices)’, and ‘assessment of teachers’ attitude and behaviour as part of their performance evaluation’. In relation to the quality and relevance, SSRP emphasized on ensuring minimum enabling conditions – physical and learning environments. A school’s physical environment includes the condition of school buildings, provision of adequate classrooms, separate toilets for girls and boys, drinking water facilities and a playground. The learning environment includes availability
of qualified and trained teachers, curriculum and textbook materials, teacher’s time on task, extra-curricular activities and so forth. SSRP also emphasized in setting norms and standards. The national norms and standards include an environment for equitable participation; safe, secure and child friendly classroom; adequate instructional processes including multi lingual education (MLE) approaches and materials, and adequate number of qualified teachers. Decisions regarding local curriculum, performance targets, school calendar, classroom organisation, and instructional methods will be made at the school level.

SSRP, 2009-15 envisioned possibility of three types of school at the basic level - Foundation, Primary or Upper Primary.

i. Foundation School (1-3) – at least one foundation school in each settlement with 30-40 or more households and/or 150-200 or more population or 100-150 population in the age range of 5-7 years. Since foundation schools are supposed to be located in sparsely populated localities, feasibility of multi grade teaching will be also tested in some schools.

ii. Primary School (1-5) – at least one primary school in villages with 80-100 or more households and/or 400-500 or more population or 200-250 population in the age range of 5-9 years.

iii. Upper Primary School (1-8) – at least one upper primary school in villages with 150-200 or more households and/or 800-1000 or more population or 300-350 population in the age range of 5-13 years.

Thus policy documents in the Nepalese education have envisioned multigrade teaching at the lower grades, mainly at grades 1-5. SSRP has further emphasized that multi-grade teaching can be introduced as pedagogical choice in identified schools that meet nationally defined criteria. The local government will select schools qualifying to operate MGT in consultation with the technical body/DEO. MGT and Grade Teaching can be practiced at the basic education and
especially in foundation grades. Specially designed learning package/ facility will be provided for identified multi-grade schools, and special needs classes.

**Teacher Allocation Practices**

Education act has provisioned minimum of teacher position in this manner – 1 teacher in a pre-primary, 2 teachers in a primary with 50 students and 3 teachers in a primary school with more than 50 students. This is in practice at present. However, SSRP has suggested minimum number of teachers at the foundation school to be 3 teachers; 6 teachers at a primary school; and 10 teachers in the upper primary schools including a separate head teacher position. SSRP has envisioned on average, the School Student Ratio to be 1:133 at primary; Student Teacher Ration 38:1 based on the approved positions of the teachers in community schools.

**Designation of Multigrade School**

SSRP and various research studies (CERID, 2003, 2005 and 2006) indicated MGT in practice in a school where one or more of these conditions existed – more number of classes than number of teachers; teachers’ absenteeism; or inadequate number of classrooms. These conditions are indicative of the practices where MGT is considered a choice to cover more students of different grades at the same time rather than a pedagogical choice for enhancing quality of teaching learning.

Similarly above mentioned reports has found variety of MGT practices – more than one grade at the same classroom taught be a single teacher; more than one grade at the same classroom taught be a single teacher, but students grouped and taught in their own group as a separate grade; and more than one grade taught be a single teacher, but students remain in their own classroom and teacher moves between the classes (multiclass). Recent practice piloted by Department of Education (DOE) is Multigrade Multilevel (MGML) at the selected primary schools in Nepal. Thus there is no clear cut MGT definition and practices in Nepal. However, SSRP has defined small school as schools with 1-3 grades only. By this definition there are 388 small schools having Grade 1 only; 1017 schools with Grades 1 and 2 only; and 4864 schools
with Grades 1-3 only. Thus there are a total of 6269 small schools as defined by SSRP. There are 112 schools where MGML is being piloted by DOE.

**Training on Multigrade Teaching**

National Center for Educational Development (NCED), which is the responsible government institution in Nepal for in-service teacher training in Nepal has covered MGT in its training packages at various times in Nepal. For example MGT has been covered in the 2.5 months packages of 10 months in-service training (NCED, 2005); 10 days recurrent training MGT package (NCED, 1998) and MGT in teaching methods sections of training manuals (NCED, 2000). At present NCED is delivering Teacher Professional Development (TPD) package which is demand based. NCED is also conducting MGML training in collaboration with DOE (2012).

The curriculum in the multigrade context is the same as the national curriculum developed for the Nepalese schools. Only difference is in the classroom management in the MGT situation. In the MGT same grade-wise textbook are normally used. In case of MGML government prescribed textbooks are used only as reference materials. MGML is supported with various materials such as lesson plans; teaching materials for multi grade classes; checklist with milestones, learning ladder, learning cards with activity logo; grouping cards according to learning cards; student daily work format; assessment formats; workbooks and teachers guides are provided.

**Studies on Multigrade Teaching**

CERID (2003) undertook ‘a study on multigrade/multi class teaching: status and issues’. This study found that about 73% of primary schools in the sample districts had less number of teachers that the grades. With respect to the teachers’ involvement in different instructional arrangements of multigrade, multiclass and mono-grade teaching was found to be 23%, 36% and 41% respectively in the sample schools. Regarding the teaching learning practices in these classrooms, almost all the teachers used traditional methods of teaching based on explanation,
motivation by threat, unnecessary punishment, textbook dependent teaching and rituals giving homework and class-work.

2003 study of CERID led to the development and implementation of piloting of multigrade teaching in selected Nepalese schools (CERID, 2005 and 2006). For this curriculum on MGT were developed, instructional materials prepared as well teacher’s guide was developed. Teachers were provided with general orientation on MGT and use of MGT support manual. The final report of the piloting (CERID, 2006) observed that the project has succeeded in developing curriculum materials and teacher education materials relevant to the multigrade setting. However, most of the curriculum support for the multigrade teacher has been piecemeal and illustrative. Differentiated curriculum approach (Environment Health Sanitation and Social Studies grades 2 and 3; Social Studies grades 4 and 5; Science, Environment and Health Education grades 4 and 5) was adopted by CERID. There was also initial resistance to the idea of curriculum adaptation from curriculum developers for whom a curriculum process oriented towards the mono-graded class had been a norm.