

## **Multigrade teaching in Japan, Peru, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam (4 views of multigrade)**

### ***Multigrade teaching in Japan***

Japan has a substantial number of multigrade classes, especially in small primary schools located in the less populated areas of the country. Although multigrade classes, as a general principle, are not encouraged by the administration, some special arrangements for this kind of class formation exist on both the national and local level. Multigrade classes in Japan never comprise more than two grades. A special two-year cycle curriculum, based on the general national curriculum policy, is often developed for multigrade classes on the local level. According to this curriculum pupils of two grades are taught as a single class. Education administrators often tend to merge small schools because of their high maintenance cost. Likewise, the pedagogical aspects of multigrade teaching are rarely raised by educational researchers in Japan. However government authorities specifically allocate some subsidies to small schools to overcome disadvantages which are caused by the size of the school.

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### ***Multigrade Teaching in Peru***

Currently, Peru has approximately 21,500 primary multigrade schools, 96% of which are located in rural areas. In terms of teachers, 41,000 teach in rural primary schools with multigrade classrooms, representing 69% of the total rural teaching force. Most of the schools in the countryside are multigrade (89%), which testifies to the importance of this type of school for improving the educational level of the rural population.

Of the most important characteristics affecting the educational situation it is worth mentioning: the dispersion and isolation of the rural population; the poverty of the villages (60% of the population in rural areas are poor and 37% live in a situation of extreme poverty); the family economy, which requires and includes children working as members of the family; linguistic and cultural diversity (Spanish, Quechua and Aymara are spoken as well as approximately 40 Amazonian languages but, despite this diversity, the language of school is Spanish, and bilingual education programs have very limited cover); finally, in rural areas children begin school late, have a high rate of repetition and have periodic interruptions in their studies, which increases the heterogeneity of the multigrade class.

The schools have severe deficiencies in infrastructure, access to services, availability of classroom furniture, equipment and materials for teaching and educational support. The teachers live in precarious conditions (no electricity, or pure water, or furniture or adequate space in which to prepare their classes or to cook food); they have few incentives (a bonus of \$13 per month) and scarce support and attention from high up offices. Formal training teacher does not instruct teachers in multigrade methodology and often teachers do not speak the students' language.

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### ***Multigrade Teaching in Sri Lanka***

Multigrade teaching in Sri Lanka is much more common than we care to realise or admit. It is common in rural and plantation schools where human and physical resources are limited. A range of reasons for multigrade teaching can be identified in the Sri Lankan context. The most significant reason is the non-availability of one teacher per grade in these schools, which in turn is due to difficulty in access, sparse pupil populations which restrict the appointment of one teacher per grade and difficult living conditions. Most of these schools have student numbers ranging from 50 to 150. According to the latest School Census by the Ministry of Education, 1,252 schools out of the 10,120 schools in Sri Lanka have less than three teachers.

Even schools in urban areas face the challenge of organising teaching and learning situations in a way similar to in a multigrade setting during some parts of the day or on some days. This is due to various reasons, including teacher absenteeism and teachers attending in-service training sessions.

The national primary school curriculum is organised towards teaching in monograde schools. Teachers in multigrade classrooms face the difficulty of organising the national curriculum to suit their teaching and learning needs. There is no provision in the Teacher Education Curriculum for multigrade teaching methodology. Thus the teaching in these schools is of very low quality. The student drop out rate is very high in these schools.

Since the 1980s, the Department of Primary Education has attempted to try out multigrade teaching strategies in some selected schools under the UNICEF assisted programme for Quality Development of Primary Education.

Very little research has been conducted on multigrade teaching in Sri Lanka.

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## ***Multigrade Teaching in Vietnam***

In Vietnam, there are many forms of multigrade classes. One teacher may be in charge of 2, 3, 4 or 5 different levels of children. So far, multigrade schools are quite widely used in ethnic minority areas with the purpose of providing primary education to disadvantaged children by bringing schools closer to communities where children live. There are 2,162 primary schools with multigrade classes, accounting for 1.8% of total primary schools. There are 143,693 students learning in multigrade classes. These represent 38% of the school population.

Problems associated with multigrade classes, include the following:-

There is a serious shortage of teachers, especially skilled teachers for multigrade teaching. Teachers of multigrade classes are working in difficult and isolated conditions. The training of teachers for multigrade classes does not meet the required standard in either quality or quantity.

Teaching methods of the ethnic minority schools are very poor and unsuccessful. For example, students are not encouraged to be involved actively in the teaching-learning process.

Most of the multigrade schools lack textbooks, guidebooks and materials for reference of students and teachers. Teaching equipment is very simple. Many multigrade classes are in very bad condition.

Pupils face language barriers when trained teachers from urban areas are sent to teach in ethnic minority schools.

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