



**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Multigrade Teaching in Secondary Schools: Realities and Constraints**

**Erinsakin Martins Ojo<sup>1</sup>, Omoluwa Olusegun<sup>2</sup> and Komolafe Ayotunde Sola<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Continuing Education and Adult and Non Formal Education,  
Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Educational Foundations and Counseling,  
Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup>Department of General Studies,  
Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.

Email: [erinsakinmartins@gmail.com](mailto:erinsakinmartins@gmail.com), [omoluwasegun6@gmail.com](mailto:omoluwasegun6@gmail.com), [omolafeayotun@gmail.com](mailto:omolafeayotun@gmail.com)

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**ABSTRACT**

*Undisputedly, effective teaching is an impetus to learning. Teaching encompasses myriad of activities by the teachers, instructors or facilitators. However, it has been observed that effective teaching at secondary school level of education in Nigeria has been impeded by several factors, one of which is the teaching of students of different grades in a classroom setting. Hence, effective dissemination of knowledge is marred by the inability of teachers to cope with students of different grade levels. Therefore this precipitated the adoption of multigrade teaching approach in recent time in order to cope with this peculiar teaching and learning situation. Therefore this paper examines the prospects and challenges of multigrade teaching approach in secondary schools in Nigeria. The paper recommends that multigrade teaching method should be made a compulsory for the teacher trainees, teachers should be made to know to use the method, while coping with classes of students of different levels e.t.c.*

**Keywords:** Multigrade, Teaching, Learning

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**INTRODUCTION**

Teaching is an intricate activity which if effective is pivotal to students' better academic performance. Multigrade teaching refers to the teaching of pupils of different age grades in the same classroom setting (Emoruwa and Ogunboyede, 2010). Nwosu (2014) opined that the overall goal of teaching is promotion of the physical, intellectual and the emotional development of the learners. Hence, in order to actualize and implement curriculum contents designed for formal education, effective teaching is not only suitable for the process but also important. Behavioural objectives can only be accomplished, when the appropriate teaching approach or strategy is used.

However, in recent time in Nigeria, teaching, most especially at Secondary School level, has become a herculean task considering the multigrade nature or setting of many schools which is caused by different factors, which Emoruwa and Ogunboyede (2010) see as cultural, rarity or paucity of teachers, high cost of transport fare amongst others. They maintained further that, in this type of setting, multigrade is the best teaching technique that can be used to enhance the quality of instructional delivery by the teachers.

It needs to be stressed equally that the academic performance of students in Secondary Schools in last ten years has been in the decline (The Chief Examiner, West Africa Examination Council, 2013). The Report indicated that only 20% of the candidates passed at acceptable credit level. This dismal performance of Secondary School students has been attributed to many factors of which the multigrade nature of some schools has been identified, as a significant factor (Adepoju, 2011).

It can be inferred that it is the realization of the ravaging trend of poor academic performance of students at Secondary School level, occasioned by the multigrade setting of the schools that led to the adoption of multigrade teaching techniques in the affected schools. This paper is written to

appraise the prospects and challenges of using multigrade teaching method at Secondary School level in Nigeria.

### MULTIGRADE TEACHING

The conceptualization of the concept "Multigrade" cannot be aptly captured by a single definition. However, different definitions that have been fashioned and tailored emphasized almost the same idea of teaching more than one level of pupils in the same class setting. Thus Multigrade teaching involves the teaching of children from two or more grade levels in one classroom. Emoruwa and Ogunboyede (2010) note that, any schools with more grades than the teachers available, the grades need to be brought together in a class for teaching and learning. Nwosu (2014) posits that every country has her own peculiar educational culture and problems. To deal with identified problems in each country there is need for new approach, method and technique. Hence, the use of multigrade teaching in a country like Nigeria is a suitable device at tackling a situation of rarity of teachers in most of the schools in the country. Ernuruwa and Ogunboyede (2010) maintained that such schools are usually located in the rural areas.

This situation requires combining students in a class for teaching. It needs to be stressed that; multigrade can also be used in a monograde class of pupils or students of the same grade levels but with different abilities academically. Multigrade classes or monograde classes are typical classrooms in all the countries in the world, Nigeria inclusive. This is therefore responsible for the training of teachers on skills to be used in either multigrade or monograde classroom settings through seminars and workshops.

### REASONS FOR MULTIGRADE CLASSES IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

One of the major reasons for having multigrade classes in Secondary Schools in Nigeria cannot be divorced from the commitment towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG); most especially in ensuring that all children of school going age has access to education by 2015. It needs to be emphasized that multigrade classes are very common in most rural areas in Nigeria, where few teachers in schools have to merge two or more class classes of different grades together and teach. Multigrade teaching is therefore a pedagogic approach that gives ample chances for teaching and learning improvement.

In this type of classroom arrangement or setting, most especially in/ the remote areas or rural settings of the country, where the geographical and socio-economic conditions determine government capability to provide enough teachers to the school. Teachers multigrade class is a panacea to the problems of teaching students in the rural areas of most countries in the world.

Emoruwa and Ogunboyeda (2010) opine that, the following factors are some of the reasons for multigrade classes in Nigeria

**1. Rarity of Teachers:** They contend that in most rural areas of the country Nigeria, it is always a problem to hire enough teachers to teach each grade level in the schools. Where this occurs, the few teachers in the school are duty bound to combine two grades for teaching.

**2. Population Size:** In some schools, the numerical strength of students is just too few for a monograde class. There are schools like this in Nigeria, most especially in the rural areas. In this case, Multigrade is the best answer to this situation. In such schools, what teachers need to do is to combine two or more grades with few students and teach.

**3. Fear of Losing Cultural Values:** Nigeria is a country, where people cherish their cultural values. There is always fear that, if their children in some communities leave their environments for schooling in another environment, such children may end up losing the cultural values of the community or cultivating bad cultural practices from another community. Hence, people in Nigeria are very careful from allowing their children to live their community for another community on the ground of education. The resultant effect of this is that, it results to a situation of having few pupils in some classes in some schools. Therefore, the need to meet the educational needs of students or pupils in these special communities results to multigrade classes.

**4. Transportation Problem:** Transport fare is too costly for people in some communities to cope with and be poor road network also which make transportation difficult for the students to move from their communities to other communities for education purpose. They further maintained that

road may be impassable, during rainy season. This situation often forces or restricts students to stay within their communities. This situation often results to having few students in many grade levels in the schools, which warrant multigrade classes

### **TEACHING IN A MULTIGRADE CLASS**

Teaching in a multigrade class is not an activity a teacher can just jump into overnight and start doing. Teaching itself involves several activities by the teachers (Oyekan, 2004). For a teacher to be very successful, using multigrade teaching technique to facilitate an enhanced qualitative instructional delivery in a multigrade setting, such a teacher needs to be well groomed on the skills and his or her roles, while adopting the technique. The following according to Emoruwa and Ogunboyede (2010) are the roles of teachers while teaching a multigrade class;

1. Identify themes and topics that are suitable to teach multigrade in the curriculum.
2. Design instructional materials for the use of each grade; independently.
3. Effective organization of the pupils by the teachers.
4. Monitoring the learners' achievement by the teacher.
5. Organize classroom space so as to accommodate different age groups and their various learning needs.
6. Judicious and effective time management.

Multigrade teachers are expected to carry out the above roles in multigrade teaching and learning situation. These will lead to achieving the pre-determined behavioural objectives and learning outcomes. Maria (2012) opines that the following are principles of multigrade teaching:

1. The uniqueness of each child or learner emotionally, intellectually, socially and physically which brings about the difference among the learners.
2. Learning best take place based on the learner's experience of events and other things in their environment.
3. That learner tends to learn from one another when they work in group.

### **THE PROSPECT OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS INNIGERIA**

Teaching in a multigrade classroom is quite different from teaching in a monograde classroom. Therefore, classroom organization, instructional materials to be used, grouping and instructional delivery techniques will also be different.

Winnipeg (2003) observes the following as prospect of multigrade teaching;

1. There are ample chances for the young child to learn from the older children.
2. Learners learn to become sound learners receiving a mix of both individual instruction and personal reflection work time.
3. Children's social skill develops more quickly and earlier as instruction with other age groups is fostered.
4. There is an increased sense of personal responsibilities, among the learners.
5. It enhances teachers' abilities to know the children better. Hence, the methods allow teaching them for number of years in the same class.
6. Academically, students perform better while teaching them by using multigrade teaching.

Also, Emoruwa and Ogunboyede (2010) posit the following as advantages of multigrade teaching.

1. Multigrade teaching is very economical to provide or meet the educational need of children in small countries, isolated areas or environment that are scarcely populated.
2. Multigrade teaching promotes individual teaching and learning. Thus, resulting in self-esteem.
3. It fosters high level of cooperation, between learners of different age groups and positive attitudes towards helping one another.

### **THE CHALLENGES OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING APPROACH**

Richlyn (2012) avers that the following are the challenges of multigrade teaching;

1. Less reliance on direct supervision by teachers
2. Multigrade teaching requires more resources, person and initiative; otherwise the system will not function very well.

3. Multigrade teaching requires more discipline, greater concentration and focus in order to benefit from, its effective strategies e.g peer teaching, group work, self-directed learning.
4. Reduced instructional time for teachers.
5. Lack of self-instructional materials.
6. Inadequate pre-and in-service teacher training in the specific skills that are required.
7. Learners with varying degrees of abilities are merged together in one class etc.

### CONCLUSION

Multigrade teaching technique is a good pedagogic tool, if well used by the teachers, that are well trained in the process or skills it requires. Hence, it has the potentials of giving opportunities to meet the educational needs of learners in difficult parts of the country, Nigeria. It enhances the quality of instructions in multigrade teaching and learning setting and better academic performance of learners in a multigrade teaching and learning setting.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

On the premise of values which multigrade teachings technique has towards achieving the pre-determined behavioral objectives in multigrade teaching and learning settings most especially at Secondary Schools levels the following recommendations are therefore made;

1. Workshop and seminars to update and upgrade teachers' skills in using multigrade teaching technique should be organized by the government or stakeholders in secondary school education,
2. Multigrade teaching method should be made a compulsory course for pre-service teachers trainee.
3. Teachers should be trained on effective class organization and management in multigrade class,
4. There should be adequate supply with instructional materials to secondary schools to enable teachers cope with multigrade classroom setting.
5. Teachers most especially at Secondary School levels of education should be made to know their roles in multigrade class.
6. Incentives should be given to the teachers who find themselves in multigrade classroom environment and using the approach.

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