

**‘Education For All’, A Myth or Reality in Rural Schools? Challenges Faced by  
Multi-grade Teachers.**

---

**By**

**Martha Joypeace Chizumila**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree  
of Master of Education (M.Ed) in Teacher Education**

**Of**

**Mzuzu University**

**Faculty of Education**

**Mzuzu, Malawi**

**March, 2015**

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my parents for all they have shared with me that have made me what I am. I also dedicate it to my husband, Benedict R.K Nyondo and my children Pius, Ignatius, Innocent, Eugene and Rosaria for their patience for the many times I was away from home during my study.

**Declaration**

I, *Martha Joypeace Chizumila*, declare that the organisation and writing of this thesis is entirely my own and has been carried out at Mzuzu University under the supervision of Associate professor DMC Nyirenda. It has not been nor is being concurrently submitted for any other degree than the degree of Master of Education (Teacher Education). Acknowledgements have been made to any piece of work used belonging to other authors.

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_

**(Student)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_

**(Supervisor)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

This case study was conducted to investigate challenges that teachers face as they teach multigrade classes in three primary schools in Lughesho zone in Chitipa District. Specifically the study aimed at establishing: knowledge and skills which teachers have for multigrade teaching; the kind of professional development which teachers receive for multigrade teaching; teaching strategies that teachers use in multigrade classes and major challenges teachers face in multigrade teaching.

The study followed a phenomenological qualitative design and it involved thirteen participants who were selected purposively. Data was collected using interviews and classroom observation. Data from interviews was transcribed and analysed by coding; then put into categories which led to the emerging of themes. Data from observation was analysed by carefully reading through the checklists. Within the process, key points were identified. Data from observation served the purpose of triangulation as it supplemented data from interviews.

Findings revealed that challenges teachers face include lack of training, negative attitude, lack of professional support, high workloads, failure to use learner centred methods, poor education quality, multigrade teachers as employers paying supporting teachers.

The general conclusion of the study is that teachers have challenges in multigrade teaching. The study recommends that stakeholders, that is, ministry officials including DTED and college lecturers should intensify orientation of PEAs, head teachers and all primary school teachers subjected to multigrade teaching on the best practices of the concept. Guidelines in form of modules could bring positive impacts on the practice of multigrade teaching, which could in the long run improve the quality of teaching in the marginalised rural schools.

Possibly, these attempts could be a stepping stone to achieving Education for All, which the study has established is at stake in rural schools.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Dr DMC Nyirenda and Professor Nathalis Wamba for their contributions towards this project. Their constructive criticisms added value to this project. Without their cooperation, understanding, dedication and generosity, I could not have finished the work.

I would also like to thank members of staff of the faculty of education of Mzuzu University who attended a colloquium when I was defending my proposal. Their contributions really shaped this piece of work.

I owe Mercy Tauzi-Ngwira, my classmate and roommate, many thanks for her support, especially for sharing with me her computer skills and Mr G.B. Nthala for tirelessly editing my work.

Furthermore, I am also grateful to the Ministry of Education for granting me paid study leave during the study period. Without this consideration, I wouldn't have managed to pay for the course. In the same way, I am thankful to Mr CBR Lupafya, the principal of Karonga Teachers' Training College for his support during my study period.

I am also indebted to all participants, that is, the PEA, head teachers, teachers and learners of Ngali, Sofwe and Ibabala primary schools in Lughesho zone in Chitipa district. Their participation made my study a success. In a special way, the following learners deserve special recognition: Mathias, Mwayira, Eliza, Valuness, Bleya, Michael, Julius, Biton, Jacob, Juliet, Junis, Edith and Martha who escorted me from one school to another, carried my luggage, walked long distances and held me by hand when I fell down in the steep slopes of Misuku hills. May God bless them so much!

Many thanks also to the **government of Scotland through the David Livingstone Bicentenary scholarships** programme for the financial support in the second year of my study. Without them it would have been very difficult for me to conduct research in the remotest areas which I targeted.

Finally, I am grateful to my family, workmates, professionals and friends for the untiring support and encouragement during the entire period of the study. However, the following deserve special thanks: Right Rev. Associate Prof. Martin Mtumbuka, Dr. Dominic Mapopa Ndengu, Fr. Denis Chitete, Fr. Charles Chinula, Mr. William Mbobe, Mr. Moses M. Wanda, Sandress Kamanga, Howard Kayange, Veronica Magawa, Frances Chiwona, Walusako Chiwona, Yonamu Ngwira, Rose Mhango, Florence Pwere, Joseph Sandamira, Annie Mzumara and James Zimba.

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Declaration.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of contents.....	vii
List of figures.....	xi
List of appendices.....	xii
List of acronyms and abbreviation.....	xiii
Definition of terms.....	xiv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background information.....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	3
1.3 Purpose of the study.....	5
1.4 Critical research question .....	6
1.5 Specific research questions .....	6
1.6 Significance of the study .....	7
1.7 Motivation/ rationale.....	8
1.8 Delimitation.....	9
1.9 Limitations.....	9
1.10 Organisation of the thesis .....	10
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW .....	11
2.0 Theories which guide the practice of multi-grade teaching .....	11
2.1 Introduction .....	11
2.2 The asset-based theory.....	11
2.3 The needs-based theory.....	13
2.4 Learning theories and strategies .....	15
2.4.1 Constructivist theory.....	15
2.4.2 Learner centred approaches.....	16
2.4.3 Collaborative learning .....	16
2.4.5 Cooperative learning .....	17
2.4.6 Peer teaching/tutoring .....	18



2.4.7	Self-directed, self-regulated or independent learning .....	19
2.5	The concept of multi-grade teaching and literature review.....	20
2.5.1	Introduction .....	20
2.5.2	Meaning of multi-grade teaching.....	22
2.5.3	Justification for multi-grade teaching in rural schools.....	24
2.5.3.1	Inadequate number of teachers and learners in the hard to reach areas. ....	24
2.5.3.2	Multi-grade teaching for other pedagogical reasons.....	27
2.5.3.3	Inadequate school infrastructure.....	28
2.5.3.4	Multi-grade as a genuine measure to address the problem of teachers in rural schools.....	29
2.5.3	Organisation of multigrade teaching.....	31
2.5.4	Classroom management techniques .....	31
2.5.5	Instructional strategies .....	32
2.5.6	Planning.....	33
2.5.7	Classroom organisation .....	34
2.6	Review of recent research studies on multi-grade teaching .....	35
2.7	Summary for literature review.....	39
<b>CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>		<b>40</b>
3.1	Introduction .....	40
3.2	Research design .....	40
3.2	Paradigm .....	41
3.3	Study area, population, sample, and sampling procedures .....	43
3.3.1	Study area .....	43
3.3.2	Study population .....	43
3.3.3	Sample size and its characteristics .....	44
3.3.4	Sampling techniques .....	45
3.4.1	Interviews .....	46
3.4.2	Observation.....	48
3.5	Trustworthiness .....	48
3.6	Data collection procedures .....	49
3.7	Ethical considerations .....	50
3.8	Data processing and analysis.....	51
3.8.1	Data processing.....	51
3.8.2	Data analysis for interviews. ....	51

3.8.3 Data analysis for observations .....	53
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS .....	54
4.1 Introduction .....	54
4.2 Theme 1: Lack of training .....	55
4.3 Theme 2: Negative Attitude .....	56
4.4 Theme 3: Lack of professional support .....	57
4.4.1 Sub theme 1: Lack of Orientation.....	57
4.4.2 Sub theme 2: Lack of workshops or seminars on multigrade teaching .....	57
4.5 Theme 4: Learners Centred approaches are difficult to use.....	58
4.5.1 Sub theme 1: Incompetent learners .....	59
4.5.2 Sub theme 2: Monitoring learners .....	59
4.5.3 Sub theme 3: Inadequate time .....	60
4.5.4 Sub theme 4: Class Size.....	61
4.6 Theme 5: General problems with classroom practice .....	62
4.6.1 Sub theme 1: Planning.....	62
4.6.2 Sub theme 2: Class management .....	63
4.6.3 Sub theme 3: Class Organization.....	64
4.6.4 Sub theme 4: Managing Time .....	64
4.6.5 Sub theme 5: Inadequate teaching and learning resources.....	65
4.6.6 Sub theme 6: High teaching load.....	66
4.7 Theme 6: Multigrade teachers employing and paying assistant teachers. ....	67
4.8 Theme 7: Poor education quality.....	68
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	70
5.1 Summary of findings.....	70
5.2 Conclusion.....	71
5.3 Recommendations.....	72
5.4 Areas of further research. ....	74
REFERENCES .....	75
APPENDICES .....	85
APPENDIX 1: Interview guide for multigrade teachers .....	85
APPENDIX 2: Interview guides for headteachers and Primary Education Advisor (PEA) .....	86
APPENDIX 3: Codes, categories and themes from interviews .....	87
APPENDIX 4: Classroom observation checklist .....	90

APPENDIX 5: Observations and their interpretations. ....	91
APPENDIX 6: Consent form for participants.....	91
APPENDIX 7(a) Classroom observaton photographs.....	93
APPENDIX 7 (b) Classroom observertion photographs .....	94
APPENDIX 7(c) Classroom obsevation photographs.....	95
APPENDIX 7(d) Classroom observation photographs .....	96
APPENDIX 7(e) Classroom observation photographs.....	97
APPENDIX 8: Enrolment for Ngali, Ibabala and Sofwe primary schools.....	98
APPENDIX 9: Consent form to allow use of photos for dissemination of information .....	99
APPENDIX 10: Letter of permission .....	100

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Patterns for organising multigrade classes

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1: Interview guide for multigrade teachers
- Appendix 2: Interview guide for head teachers and Primary Education Advisor (PEA)
- Appendix 3: Codes, categories and themes from interviews
- Appendix 4: Classroom observation checklist
- Appendix 5: Observations and interpretations
- Appendix 6: Consent form for participants
- Appendix 7(a): Teacher with Standard 3 and 4 learners; Standard 5 learners with a teacher
- Appendix 7(b): Standard 1 and 2 learners in one class; Standard 4 learners working
- Appendix 7(c): Standard 6 learners waiting for the teacher; Standard 2 lesson in progress
- Appendix 7(d): Standard 1 learners waiting for their turn
- Appendix 7(e): Standard 2 lesson in progress
- Appendix 8: Enrolment for Ngali, Ibabala and Sofwe Primary Schools
- Appendix 9: Consent form to allow use of photos for dissemination of information
- Appendix 10: Letter of permission

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CPD	Continued Professional Development
DEM	District Education Manager
DTED	Department of Teacher Education and Development
EFA	Education for All
ESDP	Ethiopian Education Sector Development Plan
ESIP	Education Sector Implementation Plan
IPTE	Initial Primary Teacher Education
MGDs	Millennium Development Goals
MIE	Malawi Institute of Education
MIITEP	Malawi Integrated Initial Teacher Education
MOEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
PEDP	Primary Education Development Plan
PIF	Policy Investment Framework
SLA	Self learning Activity
WTP	World Teacher Programmes

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

<i>Asset-based approach</i>	A process of solving problems in rural communities by using existing assets both tangible and intangible.
<i>Collaborative learning</i>	Refers to interaction among students, interactions between the teacher and students during the process of teaching and learning.
<i>Constructivism</i>	A learning theory which emphasises learners making meaning of the learning process and creating their own knowledge based on how they understand concepts.
<i>Cooperative learning</i>	A learning situation in which all learners learn together with the goal of enhancing their own achievement and that of others. Each learner has a responsibility to make others achieve.
<i>Double shifting</i>	A way of organising learning usually in situations of high enrolment. Learners are divided into two sets but use the same facilities, infrastructure and equipment, among others.
<i>Education for All</i>	Providing education to all citizens by removing barriers which hinder them to access educational opportunities.
<i>Learner-centred approaches</i>	Teaching and learning methods which give autonomy to the learner during the process of teaching and learning. In this study, learner centred approaches is used interchangeably with participatory methods.

<i>Multi-grade teaching</i>	Process where one teacher is responsible for two or more grades within one teaching period.
<i>Participatory learning</i>	A learning experience in which all learners are involved.
<i>Peer teaching</i>	A practice in which learners teach each other either in a whole Class (one learner teaching the whole class) or peer to peer (Peers teaching each other within groups or in pairs)
<i>Scaffolding</i>	A psychological term which refers to a situation where a learner needs to be 'helped out' of a situation. A teacher or a more able learner can assist in scaffolding. Scaffolding involves pushing learners from where they are stuck to a level where they can continue on their own. It is like providing a ladder to someone who is short for him or her to reach the roof.
<i>Self-regulated learning</i>	An independent type of learning where the learner learns by interacting with resources provided by the teacher. It is different from individualised learning where teaching and learning is one-to-one, one student to one teacher or one student to one computer (in this case a computer is used as medium of instruction not as teaching and learning material).



## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background information**

#### **Teacher deployment in rural schools**

The principle of Education for All (EFA) placed a responsibility on government to actively address deficiencies of its children in the public education system of Malawi, largely in the rural areas where an estimated 30% of the school going age reside (Little, 2007). In an attempt to respond to EFA, Malawi introduced Free Primary Education which led to the rise of enrolment in primary schools from 1.9 million to about 3.2 million (UNICEF,1998). This increase resulted in the acute shortage of teachers especially in rural schools (Kunje & Lewin, 2003). As a way of addressing the problem, 22,000 untrained teachers were recruited with the view that they would be trained on the job. A number of fast track programmes were put in place to train these teachers and some of them were: the one year programme, and MIITEP (Malawi Integrated Initial Teacher Education Programme) (Lynd, 2005). However, these attempts did not materialise.

By 2006, Malawi was far from reaching the expected number of teachers to the extent that another fast track mode was introduced. This was a 1 + 1 mode (1 year college based and one year school based) known as Initial Primary Teacher Education (IPTE). This programme was designed to supply the teachers in rural schools. Students had to sign a contract committing them to work in rural schools. In 2009, another programme was introduced, the IPTE-ODL programme which was also specifically to address shortage of teachers in rural schools (World Bank, 2010). All these attempts did not meet the expected number of teachers who could teach the nearly 3.2 million learners.

There are a number of reasons which contribute to having few teachers in rural schools. One of them, very obvious, is the policy of 1:60 teacher-pupil ratio. In many remote schools, enrolment is low and therefore deployment of teachers has to match the enrolment. However, in some cases, there are fewer teachers compared to the enrolment.

On the other hand, where adequate teachers are deployed, there are other social problems that reduce the numbers. As observed by Mulkeen (2010), the problem of shortage of teachers in rural schools cannot be solved simply by recruiting, training and deploying more teachers. He argues that there are several factors which contribute to shortage of teachers in rural schools. One of the reasons is that teachers do not stay long in rural schools due to poor health. With the HIV pandemic and other chronic illnesses, some teachers request to be close to hospital facilities. Others follow spouses in urban areas. Another crucial problem is related to poor living conditions in rural schools. Teachers often express concern about poor accommodation or lack of the same, the working environment, access to leisure activities and public facilities. These factors plus many others reduce the number of teachers willing to work in rural schools despite rural allowance being paid.

Basing on these reasons, it is clear that apart from recruiting more teachers, other measures are necessary in order to solve the problem of shortage of teachers in the rural schools of Malawi. Some of the measures could be double shifting, overlapping and multi-grade teaching (Mulkeen and Chen, 2008; ESIP, 2009).

In many of the schools where teachers are few, double shifting seems to have an upper hand in addressing the problem of shortage of teachers. To the contrary, several studies indicate that double shifting is not meant to address the problem of shortage of teachers but rather the problem of overcrowded classes in urban areas by having two shifts in

one school. Studies also reveal that double shifting is more effective if each shift has a separate set of teachers which is not the case in the rural schools (Barrel et al., 2007; Mulkeen, 2011). Multi-grade teaching is probably the proper way of dealing with the long standing issue of shortage of teachers in rural schools. By definition, multi-grade teaching involves one teacher handling two or more grade levels at a time either in one class or in separate classes (Birch & Lally, 1995)

Despite the fact that multi-grade teaching is one of the major innovations to solve the problem of inadequate teachers in rural schools, little or nothing is done to prepare teachers for such a practice. As emphasised by Vincent (2005), if teachers are not supported in terms of planning, staff development, materials and assessment procedures, multi-grade teaching may have a negative impact on teaching and learning. It is against this background that this study was conducted to investigate the challenges that teachers face in multigrade teaching in rural schools.

### **The status of multi-grade teaching in Malawi**

Multi-grade teaching involves one teacher teaching two or more grade levels at a time, either in one class or in separate classes (Birch & Lally, 1995). Literature on multi-grade teaching in Malawi is scanty but the scarce resources existing provide evidence for its prevalence. Little (2007) observes that Malawi does not have a high proportion of multi-grade classes as the population density is sufficient in most areas to support single grade classes. However, she notes that apart from population density, other problems such as difficulties to post teachers to rural schools, lack of cover for teacher absence and shortage of classrooms during the rainy season necessitate multi-grade pedagogy. Indeed, these reasons have contributed to Malawi, being one of the commonwealth countries practising multi-grade teaching (Commonwealth, 2005). As for Picas (2007), multi-grade teaching in Malawi is common in lower primary classes

because of the policy of education for all, which has opened up education for children who have not had it before.

Mulkeen (2010) also agrees that multi-grade teaching is widely practised in Malawi. However, he notes that despite its widespread usage, it is rarely well integrated into policies or teacher education system. To the contrary, neighbouring countries having similar problems of shortage of teachers have developed modules which guide teachers in multigrade teaching, for example, Zambia. The idea that multigrade teaching is not supported in Malawi is also supported by Kunje, Lewin and Stuart's (2003) study, who mention its prevalence without guidelines. In another study done by Mulkeen and Chen (2008), existence of multi-grade teaching in Malawi is mentioned. Indeed, in Malawian teacher education foundation studies syllabus, only a unit of three pages has been incorporated. It follows that much of the useful content for multigrade teaching is missing yet the practice is inevitable.

Croft (2007) confirms that multi-grade teaching in Malawi is common in small schools, especially in lower grades. However, she proposes that multigrade can be practised even in higher grades because small classes of twenty or less are common in rural schools. She suggests that teacher education and development has a clear role to play in discovering ways of responding to multigrade teaching. In fact, multigrade teaching and education for all should not be separated as far as teaching and learning is concerned, in typical rural schools where the right to quality education seems to be violated.

Although multi-grade teaching is informal in Malawi, some teachers seem to understand its significance. In an evaluation study on World Teacher programmes (WTP) by Heijker (2012) involving Dutch and Malawian teachers, results revealed positive attitude of some Malawian teachers towards multi-grade teaching in Mzimba

district. When the Dutch teachers observed and looked at the situation in the schools, they thought of introducing multi-grade teaching which Malawian teachers welcomed. A similar situation was witnessed in Ndalama and Chidalengwa (2010) study cited in Steiner-Kamsi and Kunje (2011). Seventy-seven teachers and managers situated in 58 schools across the country were interviewed. The outcome was that some teachers supported the pedagogical concept of multi-grade teaching though many of them had negative attitude. What followed was that multigrade teaching was piloted.

Development partners for education in Malawi also recommend multi-grade teaching for the rural schools. UNICEF Malawi's deputy representative, Dr Muita expressed that the 3,000 teachers who graduate from the six government run colleges and five private colleges every year are not enough to meet the shortfalls in a short period of time. She emphasised that other innovative strategies like the use of assistant teachers, double shifting and multi-grade teaching could greatly contribute to reducing the problem of shortage of teachers. In addition, she mentioned that UNICEF was committed to supporting the government of Malawi to regulate multigrade and double shift teaching to reduce the teacher-pupil ratio (Kubwalo, 2011). Surprisingly, experience has shown that many officials at both low and high levels seem to neglect multigrade teaching.

Generally, the negligence of multi-grade teaching as literature shows emanates from the education system itself. Multi-grade teaching is not emphasised as a potentially cost effective way of providing education in difficult-to-reach areas.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Since the introduction of Free Primary Education in Malawi in 1994, high enrolments have been observed across the country. The problem of shortage of teachers continues to exist especially in rural schools. For 20 years of existence of Free Primary Education in Malawi, the government has a challenge of supplying teachers to meet the demand.

The number of teachers remains inadequate especially in rural areas where deployment of teachers is difficult due to a number of factors.

Globally, efforts are being made to maximise the provision of quality education through existing human resources. Multigrade teaching has emerged as one of the solutions to this long standing issue of shortage of teachers in many countries including Malawi. Although multigrade teaching is practised in Malawi, teachers are practising it without proper guidelines. This implies that teachers are likely to face challenges because multigrade is an innovation which is more demanding compared to monograde teaching.

It is against this background that the study was conducted to investigate challenges faced by rural primary school teachers in multigrade teaching.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

This study aimed at investigating challenges which teachers in rural schools face in multigrade teaching, specifically in Lughesho zone in Chitipa district.

### **1.4 Critical research question**

What challenges do teachers in Lughesho zone in Chitipa district face in multi-grade teaching?

### **1.5 Specific research questions**

The following questions guided the researcher in answering the critical research question:

\*What knowledge and skills do teachers have for multi-grade teaching?

\*What kind of professional development do teachers receive for multigrade teaching?

\*Which teaching strategies do teachers usually use to teach in multi-grade classes?

\*What do teachers say are the major challenges in multigrade teaching?

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

The assumption is that the findings from this study could be of value to the government through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST), The Department of Teacher Education and Development (DTED), Primary Education Advisors (PEAs), primary school teachers and head teachers and all cooperating partners in the following ways:

- The study could inform policy makers on the need to support multi-grade teaching. The Department of Teacher Education and Development (DTED) might consider revising content on the topic ‘multi-grade’ so as to include content which can fill the knowledge gaps revealed from the study. Findings might also act as a guide for coming up with a training package for multi-grade teaching.
- Findings would also help in improving practice. If the challenges are revealed and addressed effectively, the teaching and learning process would improve in rural schools. Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) would use the results more especially in organizing Continued Professional Development (CPD) workshops on how teachers can effectively teach multi-grade classes. The entire body of primary school teachers can also benefit directly if the findings could be exposed to them.
- The findings could also lead to further research on multi-grade teaching. So far, it seems little or nothing has been researched on multi-grade teaching in Malawi.

## **1.7 Motivation/ rationale**

The principle of Education for All (EFA) is inseparable from ‘quality education’. The slogan for EFA is ‘quality education by 2015’. In Malawi, many education documents like National Education Sector Plan (NESP), Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP) and Policy Investment Framework (PIF) mention quality education for all. However, quality education in the marginalised areas where teachers are few is a challenge due to several factors. Fully aware of the obstacles to EFA in these marginalised areas, international meetings have recommended some measures such as overlapping, double shifting and multi-grade teaching to help improve teaching and learning. These measures are also reflected in the Malawian education documents such as ESIP. Multi-grade teaching is thought to be probably the major solution where teachers are few. Surprisingly, multi-grade teaching seems not to be given enough space in the Malawian education system. It appears the government of Malawi through the ministry of education has neglected the minority in the education system.

My nine years’ experience as a primary school teacher in semi-urban schools exposed me to teaching multi-grade classes at times because of shortage of teachers. The practice could just come automatically when there was need. When I trained as a teacher educator, I happened to teach foundation studies in which multi-grade teaching is one of the topics. I became interested in the topic to the extent that I had to arrange for a practical lesson at a demonstration primary school with my class. A student teacher taught the topic ‘Physical features’ to a combined class of standard 3 and 4. From lesson observation, I learnt that the recommendation made by EFA partners that education for all can be achieved with multi-grade teaching was feasible though with some challenges and shortcomings.



My interest in ‘multi-grade teaching’ increased during supervision exercise of IPTE-ODL student teachers. Some of these teachers are placed in typical rural schools where there are three teachers against eight classes. In this case, ODL students have their own class and the two qualified teachers share the remaining classes. In extreme cases, ODL student teachers have acknowledged that they combine classes in several instances.

Since then, I have developed passion for the child in a multigade class. It is a fact that this child deserves access to quality education. I strongly believe that if challenges in multi-grade schools can be unveiled, they can be addressed. As a teacher trainer, I believe in possibilities within impossibilities in the classroom. This briefly explains why I thought of investigating the challenges teachers in rural schools face as they teach multi-grade classes.

## **1.8 Delimitation**

This study was confined to the remotest schools in Lughesho zone. As such, generalizations drawn here may not be applicable to other settings. The study also focused on multi-grade teaching which emerges out of necessity as opposed to that which is by design.

The study focused on the remotest schools which have almost permanent multigrade classes. As such, the results may not really apply to those schools where multigrade teaching happens seldom.

## **1.9 Limitations**

A major limitation to this study was the gap in literature on multi-grade teaching in Malawi. The researcher faced challenges in finding information about multi-grade teaching in Malawi. For instance, Ndalama and Chidalengwa cited in Steiner-Kamsi and Kunje (2011) noted that multigrade teaching was piloted. Results from the piloting

exercise are not known or not yet disseminated. This might have affected the results in one way or the other.

Secondly, during the piloting stage of data collection tools, it was only the interview guide which was tested. The classroom observation tool was not tested due to unforeseen circumstances at the venue. However, I used the findings from the interview guide to improve both tools so that they target the intended data.

Another limitation emerged during data collection process. Out of the three purposively sampled multigrade schools, observation was done only at one school which was found to be a 'pure multigrade' school. In the other two schools, teachers and the school management committee had employed supporting teachers, thus running away from the burden of combining classes.

Since the study was guided by phenomenological qualitative design, it was unethical to arrange for observations in schools which had quitted multigrade teaching. This might have affected data collection in one way or the other. However, the results from interviews in all the three schools confirmed the findings from classroom observation implying that the same results could have been found in the two schools.

#### **1.10 Organisation of the thesis**

This thesis has five chapters. Chapter one gives an introduction to the study. It includes background information to multigrade teaching, the purpose of the study, limits and delimits of the study. Chapter two gives literature review which includes information about the concept of multigrade and the theories that guided the study. The third chapter is a description of the methodology of the study. In the fourth chapter, findings are presented and discussed. Chapter five provides the reader with a summary of findings, conclusion, recommendations and areas for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Theories which guide the practice of multi-grade teaching**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

There are a number of theories which guide this study. These theories include those that deal with solving problems in the rural community, learning theories and learner centred approaches to learning. The asset-based theory, the needs based theory and constructivism learning theories are considered. Cooperative learning, self-regulated learning and collaborative learning represent learner-centred approaches. Multi-grade teaching is perceived as a measure to solve the problem of shortage of teachers in rural schools. By applying the asset-based approach, the assumption is that those teachers that are in rural schools with their potentials are enough ‘assets’ to solve problems.

Multi-grade teaching favours ‘participatory learning’, as such learner-centred approaches are highly commended. These entire learner-centred approaches fall under the constructivism learning theories which demand learners to construct their own knowledge. In constructivism, the teacher is just a facilitator. There is congruency between the role of the teacher in constructivist learning and in multi-grade teaching. For the teacher to allow learners to learn independently, learner centred methods such as cooperative, collaborative and self-regulated learning apply. These theories and learning strategies are discussed in detail in subsequent paragraphs.

#### **2.2 The asset-based theory**

This study is situated in the asset-based theory. A number of authors have used this approach to solve problems in rural communities for example, Ryan, 2008; Ebernsohn and Irma, 2006; Nelson, Campbell & Emanuel, 2011; Ebernsohn & Mbetse and Roots, 2011. The asset-based approach is imbedded in the field of positive psychology.

Positive psychology is an umbrella field that refers to the study of the awareness, identification and fostering of persons inner emotional and characteristic strength. Positive psychology challenges the perception that strength is underscored by weaknesses and assets by deficits (Rose, 2009 cited in Olivier et al, 2009). As explained by Ryan (2008), positive psychology focuses on intrinsic strength, assets and resources. These assets sometimes cannot be seen or touched, but play a big role in communities. The asset-based approach has similar principles as those of positive psychology. This approach is developed from the growing concern that the traditional approaches (needs-based) to intervention have been rendered inadequate (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

The asset-based approach addresses the needs of the community by filling gaps and fixing problems. It values the capacity, skills, knowledge, connections and the potential of the community. By using the asset-based approach, problems are solved internally. The asset-based approach emphasises the glass being half-full and not half empty (Ebernsohn & Eloff, 2006). Asset-based approach can help respond to approaches which are not working or not working well enough by providing new ways of challenging inequalities , valuing resilience and recognising local expertise. It requires a shift in attitude and values and limitation of the deficit way of looking at the world (Ebernsohn et al., 2003). In this study, the local expertise of teachers in rural schools on how they teach multi-grade classes will be exposed. Instead of considering the shortage of teachers as a problem in rural schools, the study used the available teachers in rural schools to understand the limitations they had on the practice of multigrade teaching.

In this study, ‘assets’ mean any factor or resource which enhances the social systems and institutions to maintain and sustain the well-being, and reduce inequalities (Nelson et al., 2011). In this case, assets were teachers and the potentials which they wield.

Assets were also the passion and interests of rural school teachers that helped them work in challenging situations, the practical skills, capacity of knowledge of teachers that enable them to teach in multi-grade classes and the resources, like learners and materials which were available for multi-grade teaching. The author also borrows a leaf from O' Leary et al., (2010), who describe assets as anything of value whether tangible or intangible. Teachers' intangible assets include experiences, personal strength, skills and knowledge. These authors claim that in most cases tangible assets are often most recognised in rural communities but in reality, the intangible assets are the ones that shape what can be achieved in the rural community.

### **2.3 The needs-based theory**

The needs based approach is a traditional way of solving problems in rural communities. Eloff and Ebernsohn (2001) claim that the needs-based approach has a range of consequences that can be detrimental to any form of intervention, a prominent consequence being the danger of becoming stuck in an endless list of problems and deficiencies. Indeed this claim is in tandem with what is happening in rural schools. The call for additional teachers has never stopped. Ammerman and Parks (1998) in Eloff and Ebernsohn (2001) defines the needs based theory as an endless revolving door of collecting the same socioeconomic data, writing a report designed to highlight all the wrong with the community, and moving on without providing further assistance to address identified problems or issues. Even though the needs based approach is directly opposite to the asset based which guides this study, the researcher thought of highlighting it as a counter-reference of what is on the ground.

Eloff and Ebernsohn (2001) summarise that the needs-based approach is focused on surviving the status quo and therefore seldom associated with real change or development. In many situations, it even contributes to a sense of hopelessness because

the solutions to problems and challenges come not from within but are situated extrinsically. In the contention of this study, the needs based approach is inefficient in addressing the problem of the shortage of teachers in rural schools.

Since the problem of shortage of teachers started in Malawi, the approach to intervention has been need-based. There has been a strong focus on problems, deficiencies and needs. A number of fast track programmes have been put in place in an attempt to supply teachers in rural schools (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008; ESIP, 2009). Despite efforts to supply teachers in rural schools, the problem still exists. The asset based theory therefore highlights implications of engaging teachers in multi-grade teaching as a way of solving the problem using local expertise. Focus is on teachers as resources available in the rural schools whose strength, skills, talents and capacities manage to teach combined classes.

By choosing the asset-based approach, the researcher assumes that the needs-based approach which is currently in practice has a range of consequences that can be detrimental to the teaching and learning process in the rural schools. Eloff and Ebernsohn (2001), mention that the asset-based approach can also work in schools because individual teachers and the school itself have the assets. Teachers in rural schools are using their assets to teach multi-grade classes in the absence of proper support from the education system.

In exploring challenges faced by teachers in rural schools within the framework of asset-based theory, I wish to clarify these concepts which Loots (2011) also used in his study guided by the asset-based approach.

*Assets*- refer to teachers themselves, their creativity, their talents, knowledge and skills and capacities within them which enable them to teach multi-grade classes.

**Resources-** refer to whatever has the capability of supporting the process of multi-grade teaching and learning, for example, classrooms to accommodate two or more classes.

**Asset-based initiative-** refers to the initiative that strengthens multi-grade teaching by utilising the assets and resources effectively, for example, workshops on multi-grade teaching.

**Asset identification-** refers discovering the assets which are available in rural schools.

**Asset management-** refers to the responsibility to maintain initiated actions by means of effective management. Multi-grade is an initiative in rural schools but how is it being maintained?

## **2.4 Learning theories and strategies**

### **2.4.1 Constructivist theory**

The general understanding of constructivism is that it is a theory of learning or meaning- making that individuals create on the basis of interaction between what they already know or believe, with the knowledge they come into contact with (Richardson, 2003). Alternatively, Collins (2008) defines constructivism as a learning process of constructing meaning. It is how people make sense of their experiences. The early development of constructivism theory can be attributed to the works of John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget. Constructivism is a theory of learning not of teaching. By nature, the constructivist learning environment is learner centred rather than teacher centred. It places the student at the centre of learning experiences.

In developing learning experiences that will have maximum benefit to students, the instructor should also be cognizant of the needs of individual learners. Learning from mistakes can be a key element of constructivist learning activities as they provide

opportunities for further learning and are a natural part of the learning process. Some learners learn better from their own mistakes while others learn better from the mistakes of others. To satisfy the demands of all learning styles, many of the learning activities may require cooperative learning through group projects and presentations.

In a multi-grade pedagogy, constructivist learning should be a rule not an option. As the teacher moves from one class to another, one group to another and one individual to another, constructivist activities are a must. Without the guidance of this theory, the study in multi-grade teaching is a non-starter.

#### **2.4.2 Learner centred approaches**

Learner centred methods are those that focus on learning rather than teaching. They focus on the role of the active learner at the centre of teaching and learning process and developing learners' autonomous thinking (InWent, 2008). Learner-centred education increases intellectual curiosity, creativity, drive and leadership skills (Henson, 2003 in Collins, 2008). Interestingly, it is worthy to note that multi-grade teaching is one of the learner-centred approaches according to InWent (2008). However, this study will focus on the practicalities of multi-grade teaching which qualify this pedagogy to be 'learner centred'. Collaborative learning, cooperative learning and self-regulated learning will be considered as well.

#### **2.4.3 Collaborative learning**

Collaborative learning is one of the teaching strategies founded in the constructivism theory. Smith and Macgregor (1992) provide an account on collaborative learning. It is defined as an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual efforts by students or students and teachers together. In collaborative learning, students work together in groups of two or more, mutually searching for



understanding, solutions, and meanings or creating a product. Collaborative learning activities vary widely, but most of them centre on students exploration or application of the course material not simply teachers' presentation or application of it. Teachers who use collaborative learning approaches tend to think of themselves as designers of intellectual experiences for students and as coaches or mid-wives of a more emergent learning process. According to Panitz (1996), collaborative learning is favoured because students' talk is emphasised alongside with sharing of authority and group consensus.

In multi-grade settings, collaborative learning applies because in most cases, teachers have to leave work in one class or group as they teach the other. Such activities call for collaborative approach. Collaborative learning is closely related to cooperative learning because both are founded on the constructivist theory and they are based on placing individuals into teams. However, cooperative learning is slightly different as it can be understood from the description below.

#### **2.4.5 Cooperative learning**

Henderson (1992) positions cooperative learning as 'brain child' of Robert Slavin. By definition, cooperative learning is a process of working in groups in which students work together to maximise their learning and that of others (Maxim, 1995). In Geoff's (2009) words, cooperative learning is a name given to a 'clutch of special teaching methods that are structured to achieve specific characteristics thought to enhance learning'. Indeed cooperative learning is not just one method but a number of them. Examples of such methods include jigsaw, think-pair- share and three minute review.

The most striking feature in cooperative learning that makes it work better in a multi-grade setting is that individuals are concerned with each other's achievement. Members have the responsibility for their own mastery of skills and knowledge and that of others.

Group members operate in the spirit of ‘swim or sink’ together. Like any other teaching strategy under constructivism theory, group work is a priority but the roles of group members are different. In his observation, Panitz (1996) notes that in cooperative teaching groups, tasks are divided and each student is responsible for his own task which is shared to all members later. Another interesting feature is that there is competition, usually between teams. Collaboration comes in when learners join their efforts to win the competition. It implies that in a cooperative learning environment, peer teaching is inevitable.

#### **2.4.6 Peer teaching/tutoring**

Peer tutoring is yet another learner centred approach associated with the constructivist learning theory. Peer teaching or tutoring is an instructional method in which one child tutors another in the material on which the tutor is an expert (Gordon, 2005). It is an organised learning experience in which one student serves as a teacher or tutor and the others are learners or tutees. The idea of students teaching other students is not a new concept discovered in the twenty-first century, according to Gordon (2005). The ancient Rome and Hindu schools used mutual instruction of one student to another. Peer tutoring gives students an opportunity to construct their knowledge in a meaningful social experience. It is not only beneficial to tutees but also to the tutor. Tutors reinforce their own learning by reviewing and reformulating their knowledge.

Peer teaching in multi-grade learning is one of the strategies used. It serves the purpose of ‘scaffolding’ that is, able or older learners assisting the younger ones or less able ones. It is biased more to teaching than learning. Peer learning has the advantage of interaction with peers and the opportunity for mutual support and stimulation. In a multi-grade class, peer teaching can be both ‘class wide’ and ‘individual’. Class wide

peer tutoring may involve activities such as reading and spelling. Some activities which are more demanding such as mathematical concepts may need individual peer teaching.

#### **2.4.7 Self-directed, self-regulated or independent learning**

Self-regulated or independent learning is a learning experience where the learner learns without or with minimal supervision. As purported by Tsolakidis; Sotriou and Koulouris (2005), self regulated learning involves learners moving from being externally controlled by teachers or others to being active in the control of their own learning processes. They cite three advantages of self regulated learning. Firstly, it involves competencies that allow learners to do realistic diagnoses of what they already know and need to learn; secondly, it is conceptualised as happening in three moments: before, during and after; thirdly, self regulated learning takes the role of the teacher as a facilitator. It implies that self regulated learning has the potential to engage learners into learning tasks more than when they have a teacher in class.

However, Petty (1998) indicates that self-directed learning is a difficult method to use but works better if enough care is given to task design, monitoring and assessment. Although Petty labels it as ‘difficult’, independent learning can work well in multi-grade setting. At times, multi-grade demands learners to do self-study with the resources provided. It is an effective approach which makes learners get committed to tasks. More profoundly, independent learning helps to maintain class discipline. Berry (n.d) also supports self regulated learning as having an advantage of saving time. Perhaps, as learners engage in self regulated tasks, teachers have the time to mark learners’ work and attend to those that need individual help. It is with the assistance of self regulated learning that the teacher can complete the planned work within scheduled time.

In summary, the methods explored so far guided the study because the assumption was that all the methods used in multi-grade classes revolve around them.

## **2.5 The concept of multi-grade teaching and literature review**

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

Multi-grade teaching is not a new idea. It is a feature in the education system world over. It dates back to the beginning of formal education system and it was not until the 1800s that teaching on one grade in the classroom became prominent. Despite this development, multi-grade teaching remains a reality and for some learners, especially in developing countries, it is often the only way to access education. Worldwide and throughout the history of education, many teachers have found themselves confronted with the demanding situation of teaching two or more classes at the same time. This type of organisation of classes still holds to date and will definitely continue to bloom (Vincent, 1999). Indeed, for many schools in rural areas, multigrade teaching is probably the only hope for teachers who find themselves challenged with the hard task of teaching more than two classes.

Literature review shows that multi-grade teaching has a long history and prevalence throughout the world both in developed and developing countries such as Canada, the United States, Netherlands, Australia, India, China, Indonesia, Columbia, Togo and Zambia (Juvane, 2005). Even in Malawi, multigrade teaching is an old phenomenon. Experience has shown that the tendency of combining classes has existed for a long time. At times multigrade teaching has gone to the extreme such that one teacher teaches all the classes. In developed countries like the United States, multi-grade teaching was already in existence by the mid-1960s through the 1970s when a number of schools implemented open education, ungraded classrooms and multi-groupings as noted by Vincent (1999). Aghazadeh (2004) also agrees that multi-grade and multi-age

have long education history in the education system more especially in the Asian-Pacific countries. Concurring with Aghazadeh (2004), is Little (2001) who also notes that the terms 'multi-age' and 'multi-grade' are used interchangeably in North America because there is multi-age in both multi-grade and mono grade classes.

As a way of illumination on multi-grade and multi-age, Veenman (1995) distinguishes between multi-grade and multi-age. The latter is individualised developmental focus and manifests in a continuous progress than graded curriculum. It is for class groups of students varying in age. In multi- age, students remain with one teacher for two or more years. On the other hand, all these authors view multi-grade as arising from administrative and economic necessity in contrast to the multi-age grouping, which is seen to result from deliberate decision based on a particular pedagogical and philosophical approach.

In South Africa, as noted by Drost et al (1999), periodicals on education during the past few decades have yielded significant evidence that the virtue of the 'one-room school house' have not been forgotten by educationists. Multi-grade teaching can also be traced in Zambia. It was introduced to a number of Zambian primary schools in rural areas in the mid-1980s as part of a consciously formulated project supported by the Ministry of General Education and Culture and the Swedish International Development Authority (Drost et al., 1999).

From the few examples highlighted, multigrade teaching is perhaps a remedy to overcoming the challenges related to the shortage of teachers in rural schools. In many countries, more especially in rural areas, teaching and learning is possible because of the concept of multigrade. According to Juvane (2005), it is evident that multi-grade classes are not simply an experimental feature of education occurring in the remotest areas of countries. It has been and continues to be a significant feature of education in

industrialised and developing countries, especially in Africa. The incident of multi-grade teaching at the primary school level and its likelihood that it could be a permanent feature of the education system implies that more attention ought to be given to this teaching phenomenon (Juvane, 2005). Despite its long history and wide spread occurrence throughout the world, little attention has been accorded to multi-grade teaching by researchers, education ministries, teacher education institutions and teacher organisations. It is for this reason that Juvane (2005) calls for ‘redefining of multi-grade teaching’ to address problems and issues facing most education systems. As observed by Birch and Lally (1995), multi-grade teaching is not a temporary measure, it is concerned with the policy of education for all- it is a long time task.

In Africa, because of the ever existing problem of shortage of teachers, teacher absenteeism owing to HIV and AIDS related causes and budget constraints facing many countries, multi-grade classes is an inevitable option. Ministries of education have to see multi-grade teaching approaches as a key pedagogical tool that can assist teachers to cope with teaching in these very difficult situations.

Much as multigrade seems to provide hope for rural schools, its success is dependent on teachers having positive attitude towards the concept. As predicted by Mathot (2001), Negative attitude can have detrimental effects on the practice of multigrade teaching. Teachers may cope with the hard task of handling two or more classes at once if they have willingness to practise the concept.

### **2.5.2 Meaning of multi-grade teaching**

Several authors have defined multi-grade teaching in a variety of ways but almost all of them converge on one point. According to Birch and Lally (1995), multi-grade teaching is a term used to describe the teaching in primary education from a number of classes usually in one class. It is a situation in which a teacher teaches more than one grade

concurrently either in one classroom or in different classrooms. The combination of classes is usually close to each other. For example, grade one and two or five and six in one classroom. The composition of multigrade classes has a psychological implication. Cube (2012) argues that the combination of classes has to follow Piagetian stages of development. Standard 1 and two are between 5 to 7 years- sensori motor stage. 3 and 4 are between 7 to 11 years- concrete operational stage, 5 to 8 are between 12 and 18- formal operational stage. Such groupings allow for learners to participate in almost the same learning activities, use the same resources among other advantages.

Multi-grade teaching is also described as the type of instruction which involves children of at least a two years grade span and diverse ability levels grouped in a single classroom. They are encouraged to share experiences involving intellectual, academic and social skills (Vincent, 1999). Aghazadeh (2004) has a similar understanding of multi-grade teaching with other authors, but adds a component of 'multi-age'. He explains that in a multi-grade classroom, at least two or more classes are taught by a single teacher but these students are also multi-aged. As for Juvane (2005), multi-grade teaching refers to a teaching in which one teacher instructs pupils of different ages, classes and abilities in one classroom. It is also referred to in the literature as multi-level, multi-classes, composite class and the case of one teacher school known as 'unitary school'

Several other authors have defined multi-grade teaching in almost the same way (Beukes, 2006; Hargreaves et al., 2001; Bharadwaj, 2008; Berry, 2005 & Little, 2001) to mention a few. However, Juvane (2005) claims that multi-grade teaching is misunderstood by many educators and key education officers because of the different definitions used. The general understanding therefore is that multi-grade involves one teacher teaching two or more classes in one timetable period.

### **2.5.3 Justification for multi-grade teaching in rural schools**

Literature has revealed the need for multi-grade teaching in the disadvantaged remote areas. Some conditions which necessitate multi-grade teaching are; inadequate teachers to support mono grade system, inadequate number of learners to call for one teacher per class, inadequate school infrastructure, pedagogical reasons and that it best suits in the rural settings as compared to other measures of addressing the problem of shortage of teachers (Little, 2001; Juvane, 2005; Bray, 2008; Linden, 2001).

#### **2.5.3.1 Inadequate number of teachers and learners in the hard to reach areas.**

Since the early 1990s, the global communities have recognised the importance of universal education as an enabler of economic growth. Since the adoption of the goals, the number of schools has exploded throughout the developing world and more children are in schools than ever before (Mulkeen and Chen, 2008). As countries in the sub-Saharan Africa expand access to primary education, the challenge of deploying teachers is severe. Governments find difficulties to deploy teachers in the rural schools. Due to this problem, several governments have adopted multi-grade teaching. A report on the Southern Africa multi-grade Conference (2010) indicates that multi-grade teaching was introduced in part to maximise the use of available human and material resources. The report notes that multi-grade teaching is mainly for marginalised schools due to their geographical isolation, remoteness and low population densities. By introducing multi-grade education in such schools, it is recognised as a strategy and practice to reverse the trend in rural education, to enable access, equity, and quality in previously neglected areas. Several other studies have revealed the need for multi-grade schools in remote areas. Berry (n.d.), notes that multi-grade teaching is associated with small schools in remote and sparsely populated areas. In such schools, there is also high



rate of absenteeism and no 'cover' up because teachers are not enough. Multi-grade teaching becomes a solution.

Drost et al., (2005) is in agreement that multi-grade teaching is suitable for rural areas where the population density is very low. It is common for a group of 20 to 30 children with age ranging from 6-12 years receiving instruction in the so called 'one room schoolhouse'. In the same way, Little (2001) supports that in all countries multi-grade teaching is found mainly in rural areas and arise largely through necessity. In urban areas, as she notes, it arises as a matter of choice. Juvane's (2005) study provides evidence on a number of countries where multi-grade teaching is being practised in the rural setting. In Ethiopia, for example, according to Ethiopian Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP III, 2005/06 -2009/10), one area for implementing the alternative basic education mode of instruction is the use of multi-grade. The introduction of multi-grade schools was enhanced for improving access and internal efficiency of the first cycle of primary education for hard-to-reach remote communities, sparse settlement areas, pastoralists and semi-agricultural societies.

Concurrently, the history of multi-grade teaching in Zambia gives similar reasons. Tambulani (2004) cited in Juvane (2005) suggests similar reasons. In Zambia, multi-grade teaching was introduced in schools which are mostly in rural and sparsely populated areas and have a difficult terrain. This was intended to increase access to education provision of the disadvantaged learners by maximising the use of available teachers and classroom space. In the case of Tanzania, the education and training policy (1995) and subsequent primary education development plan (PEDP) puts emphasis on quality education and equitable access to primary education. Quality education in the rural areas implies providing teachers with skills and strategies of multi-grade teaching that will promote pupils active learning. A report by the commonwealth secretariat

(2005) on multi-grade teaching concludes that multi-grade teaching in Africa is found in the rural primary schools because of problems of teacher supply, population size and travelling distances due to limited availability or bad roads.

There are a number of reasons why there are few teachers in the rural schools. Aghazadeh (2004) observes that in small rural schools, the number of learners is not adequate to support monograde teaching. Many countries have provided conditions on the teacher-pupil-ratio. For example, in Malawi the teacher-pupil-ratio is 1:60 (NESP, 2008). It implies that in small schools of about 100 students offering the whole primary school cycle, one or two teachers would be enough. It is common sense therefore, that education in rural schools is so complex that training more teachers may not really solve the problem. According to policy, allocation of teachers in schools goes with the number of learners. Samadan (2002) cited in Aghazadeh (2004) mentions that in rural and suburban, when the number of students is low in each grade, multi-grade teaching arises. There are also other conditions beyond the ministry's capacity to deploy more teachers in rural schools. With the Free Primary Education as a response to EFA agenda, Malawi made a policy that children should not travel distances of more than 3-5 km to school. As such, there is a system of 'satellite feeder schools' in which small schools teach the lower classes and pupils transfer to a full cycle school to attend the higher classes. Some feeder schools in Malawi use multi-grade teaching which involves merging two classes. However, feeder schools are not very problematic. What worsens the situation is rushing to upgrade feeder schools into full primary schools without considering enrolment. Upgrading schools demands employing more qualified teachers (Chiboole, 2011). Schools of such nature are subject to practising multi-grade teaching. The general understanding therefore is that socio-economic factors in rural and sparsely populated communities have often changed the traditional way of

organising learning through designated separate classes to combined classes under one teacher.

### **2.5.2.2 Multi-grade teaching for other pedagogical reasons**

Berry (n.d) explains another reason for multi-grade teaching. In some cases, multi-grade teaching may be a deliberate response to educational problems in developing countries which he notes is more linked to multi-age perspective. Proponents of mixed age grouping argue that there are sound pedagogical reasons for placing students of different ages together in the same classroom. Mixed age classes, it is argued, stimulate children social development and encourage greater classroom corporation. Despite the fact that several authors agree that multi-grade teaching is mainly for rural areas, Muthayan (1999) and Mulkeen and Higgins (2009) follow a different line of thought. They claim that prevalence of multi-grade teaching is also evident in developed countries but not for the same reasons as it does in developing countries.

In developed countries it is formed usually to assist administrators to cope with uneven class sizes and declining enrolment in urban and rural areas. On the same, Beukes (2006) agrees that multi-grade can be a solution where there is uneven learner enrolment. Grade levels are combined to make a class. Other research studies like that of Kamel Shreen Abd EI Razek (2012) have shown that many developed countries have opted for multi-grade classrooms as a more effective pedagogy which promotes the potential of students. In Sweden and Finland for instance, curricula and instruction were transformed to suit the multi-grade system. In Australia and Canada, multi-grade system is applied in the lower elementary due to their strong belief in its benefits for the early childhood phase. In England, multi-grade was practised in the 1980s to address low enrolment problems, but was also employed at a later stage for its pedagogical effectiveness (Kamel Abd EI Razek, 2012). Indeed mixed age groups can

enhance cooperation among peers to the extent that low performers can achieve better as opposed to the mono grade classroom.

McWan (1998) presents his own findings on multi-grade teaching in developed countries. He reveals that a large body of literature is focused on multi-grade teaching in developed countries. Literature shows that the rationale for employing a multi-grade classroom in developed countries is for pedagogical approaches. They bring together students of different ages and abilities in order to cope with children of different rates of development. A multi-grade setting is an environment where peer tutoring and cooperative learning encourage independence; leadership skills, self-esteem and intellectual growth among students. Although many authors associate pedagogical reasons for multi-grade teaching to developed countries, it serves the same purpose even in developing countries. It implies that benefits of multi-grade practice are double fold in developing countries that is, addressing the problem of shortage of teachers and at the same time enhancing performance through cooperative learning.

### **2.5.2.3 Inadequate school infrastructure**

Another condition raised from literature which necessitates multi-grade teaching is shortage of classrooms. Little (2007) indicates that shortage of classrooms is one of the problems in rural areas. Even if there could be a reasonable number of teachers, classes are often combined especially in the rainy season. Juvane (2005) supports the idea that rural areas have severe deficiencies in infrastructure, a problem which contributes to multi-grade teaching. In a report by Commonwealth Secretariat (1998) the shortage of classrooms contributes to the combination of classes. On a positive note, Birch and Lally (1995) argue that when classes are combined due to inadequate classrooms, teachers may take this as an opportunity to practise team teaching. Two or three teachers may teach their classes together with each one of them concentrating on their

best subject areas. This is very advantageous to teachers as they learn from one another and perfect their skills in multi-grade classes.

#### **2.5.2.4 Multi-grade as a genuine measure to address the problem of teachers in rural schools**

Measures have been put in place to address the problem of shortage of teachers in an attempt to achieve Education for All. Notable ones are double shifting, overlapping and multi-grade teaching. Experience has shown that double shifting is the most extensively used in the primary school as compared to overlapping and multi-grade teaching. Double shifting system as described by Bray (2008) involves one school catering for entirely separate groups of pupils during the school day, the first from early morning to midday and the second from midday to afternoon. The same buildings, equipment and other facilities are used. In some schools the two groups are taught by the same teachers while in some they are taught by different teachers. Overlapping is similar to double shifting let alone the fact that in overlapping the two groups of learners overlap at some point. Steiner-Kamsi and Kunje (2011) understand overlapping as a system where infant and senior classes come in the morning; junior classes join immediately infants break off allowing only the senior section to overlap with both groups.

Although multi-grade teaching seems not to be emphasised, it is perhaps the only genuine measure to improve teaching and learning in rural schools. Rural schools have low enrolment as well as few teachers, a condition which justifies why multi-grade is more fitting. Where teachers are few and learners are few, it makes sense to combine two classes so as to make one full class. The logic of practising double shifting or overlapping in rural schools where a teacher teaches, for example, 8 pupils in the morning and 10 pupils in the afternoon, is difficult to understand.

A number of studies reveal explicitly the pitfalls of double shifting as a measure to be practised in rural areas. Mulkeen (2008) notes that double shifting is evidently a measure to address the shortage of classrooms not of teachers and it is more suitable in urban areas so that the existing buildings are used properly though to some extent, it can be practised in the rural areas. Urban areas have high population densities which makes it easy to find enough pupils to run extra shifts. Bray (2008), a renowned researcher on double shifting, writes that double shifting schooling is important especially in urban areas where classrooms are few. However, he also points out that quality is compromised for quantity as teachers are likely to be tired in the second shift. Pupils also lose some teaching hours and extra-curricular activities. Katjaita (2011) is also of the same idea, mentioning that double shifting is to reduce class size where enrolments are high. Double shifting is meant to increase utilisation of existing school capacity by as much as 100%. According to Barrett et al (2007), double shifting is more suitable to reducing overcrowding classes in urban secondary schools. They claim that secondary school students are mature and they can utilise the hours they are not in class for study and assignments compared to primary school learners who need close supervision.

In the same way, Linden (2001) comments that double shifting classes are mainly for reducing overcrowding where enrolment rates are high. Relating double shifting to quality, Linden (2001) is concerned that quality is compromised as it contributes to restless youths and delinquency. Children are occupied in school for shorter periods and so have more time to roam around and cause trouble. Two countries where double shifting is discouraged for fear of compromising quality are Nigeria and Botswana (Bray, 2008; Steiner-Kamsi and Kunje, 2011). However, Linden (2001) concludes that double shift schools can be the best way to achieve the goal of universal education in both poor and rich countries. There is need to develop a policy that lays out in detail

the organisational details and the conditions for double shifting, including not compromising on the duration of instructional hours and paying teachers for extra shift.

If a number of studies indicate that double shifting is more suitable in areas of high enrolment to reduce the problem of overloaded classes, and several others mention that multi-grade teaching is for rural areas where enrolment is low and teachers are few, it implies that practising double shifting or overlapping in the rural setting could be a mismatch. Multi-grade by its nature is more fitting in rural schools so that two classes are combined to form a normal class of about 60 learners as the policy recommends.

### **2.5.3 Organisation of multigrade teaching**

There are five main areas which are generally associated with organisation of multi-grade teaching. These are classroom management techniques, instructional strategies, planning from the curriculum, time management and instructional materials. These are the areas which if not mastered, multi-grade teaching may pose a big challenge on the teachers.

### **2.5.4 Classroom management techniques**

Classroom management is one of the teaching skills which a teacher must master for effective teaching and learning. According to Berry (n.d.), in a multi-grade class, the teacher must be skilled in managing instruction to reduce the amount of dead time during which children are not productively engaged on tasks. Teachers must be aware of different ways of grouping learners to provide independent study. Grouping can help in a number of ways as observed by Birch and Lally (1995). In their groups, learners can do peer teaching where older learners from the higher grade may facilitate learning. They can also help in marking and supervising classes. Another grouping strategy is to work with one group at a time while the other is working at self-directed activities. In

some subjects learners are grouped according to ability levels. This helps students to develop at their own pace and use materials within their level of comprehension.

Organising pupils effectively as one of the areas for good multi-grade practice is hailed by the Commonwealth Secretariat (2005). The teacher needs to be imaginative in the way they group learners. For some lessons, graded grouping is used, that is, according to classes while at other times teachers may need to combine two classes together to use ability groups across the classes and allow learners to work with friends in groups or pairs or work individually. Birch and Lally (1995) add that arrangement of pupils in multi-grade teaching is flexible depending on objectives of the lessons and activities. Displaying learners work on the wall and having small libraries is also recommended in multi-grade class. If the teacher cannot find appropriate and effective ways to group learners, multi-grade teaching is at stake. When learners are well organised in their groups, class discipline is maintained.

### **2.5.5 Instructional strategies**

Approaches that increase the level of student independent and cooperative group work tend to be suggested. In cooperative group work, peer instruction is encouraged where learners act as teachers to each other. Cooperative group work involves small groups engaging in collaborative tasks. Much as collaborative learning is emphasised in multi-grade teaching, Berry (n.d.) notes that individualised learning programmes are also vital because they involve the students in self-study. Assessment is also cited as one of the strategies to encourage learning in a multi-grade class (Hargreaves, 2000). Individual learning responsibility can also be drawn on other children as an assessment resource and using assessment tasks that have learning potential. Formative assessment if properly used is instrumental to enhancing teaching and learning. Instructional strategies, according Aghazadeh (2004), are developed based on the characteristics of



the teacher, learner and the nature of the curriculum. Multi-grade teaching therefore, demands for a creative and innovative mind on the part of the teacher.

### **2.5.6 Planning**

Planning in multi-grade teaching is instrumental to teaching and learning. Most national curricular are produced on monograde classroom. Planning in multi-grade teaching is difficult because it requires plans to be written for separate levels. Teachers need to be taught how to plan across grade levels (thematic approach). A report from the Commonwealth Secretariat (2005) explains that if a teacher is to teach multi-grade classes effectively, materials from the curriculum need to be carefully selected and modified. It implies that teachers have to either select common themes from different syllabi to come up with one lesson, for example, a common theme like 'Physical features' can be identified from the syllabi of two classes and a lesson developed. Selecting common themes in multi-grade setting could be easier because classes to be combined are supposed to be adjacent. In adjacent classes, topics are almost the same but what differs is the scope. However, in some subjects where common themes cannot be identified, planning can be done in separate classes.

Time planning for multi-grade classes also needs consideration to avoid interruptions, high off track time and disruptive behaviour. Mulyan-Kyne (2004) in his study mentions that teachers considered it difficult to find time for teaching, preparation of class materials, for the marking of tests, for feedback, individual attention and remediation. Three options for time tabling have emerged from multi-grade practice in Zambia (Little, 2001). The first one is 'common timetable'. All learners learn the same subjects in a given timetable period but each grade group follows its own work according to its work programme and grade level. The second option is the 'subject stagger option'. Subjects are staggered on the timetable so that grade groups learn

different subjects which require high teacher pupil contact that are matched with those requiring little. Lastly the ‘subject grouping option’ where subjects are presented to all grade groups together at the same time. Subjects like music, art, religion lend themselves well to this option.

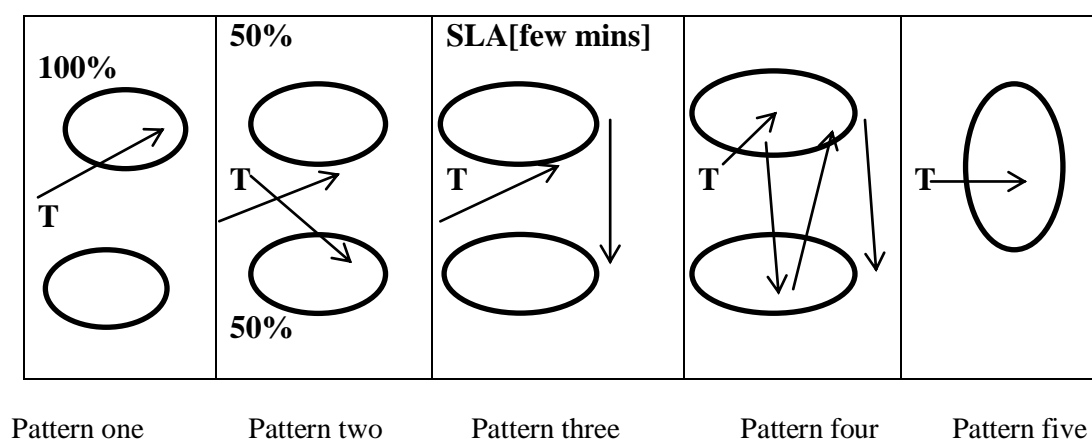
Three other strategies are identified in Philippines (Mason and Burns (1996) cited in Little, 2001). Skill subjects are taught separately in each grade level with art and music taught to the whole class. Secondly, skill subjects are taught by ability groups irrespective of grade level. In the last approach basic skills are taught to the whole class with students splitting into ability groups for extension skills. It is important to note that strategies in timetabling vary from country to country, from school to school depending on the needs.

### 2.5.7 Classroom organisation

There is no definite way of organising classes but rather they are organised in different ways depending on what subjects or activities the teacher wants to do with learners.

Suzuki (2009) has identified five patterns for multi-grade teaching. These patterns are presented in a diagram below:

Figure 1: Patterns for organising multi-grade classes.



In the first pattern teachers divide their whole teaching time during one day between the numbers of classes they have to cover and teach each grade individually. In this pattern, multi-grade teaching is implicit. The second pattern follows an equal share of time between classes. Each grade is taught separately. In the third pattern, one class is considered the main class to be taught and the other is treated as additional class. In the additional class, teachers assign self-learning activity (SLA) during the first few minutes of the period before going to teach the main class. The teacher then concentrates to teach the main class. However, Suzuki (2009) does not explain clearly whether the main class is maintained throughout or classes alternate. It sounds better if classes exchange positions so that both benefit from being in the main class. The fourth pattern puts the teacher under pressure as they visit different classrooms frequently during one period. Finally, there is whole class teaching which is mostly concerned with extra-curricular activities in most schools. However, the effectiveness of each organisation style selected is dependent on the creativity of the teacher and the experience on the strategies used.

## **2.6 Review of recent research studies on multi-grade teaching**

Little (2007), who has written extensively on multi-grade teaching maintains that multigrade teaching remains invisible despite its prevalence in many educational systems. As such, literature on the concept is mostly based on international surveys and base line studies.

This section presents few selected studies with the aim of providing vivid evidence of what other authors have found in relation to this study.

A study was conducted by Mulryan-Kyne (2004), specifically examining perceptions and beliefs of teachers regarding multigrade classes in Ireland. The study targeted ‘four grades’ multigrade classes in ‘two teacher’ schools. This exploratory study involved 75

teachers and yielded both positive and negative results. The findings revealed that multigrade classes shaped learners to become independent. Learners become high achievers and develop a positive family atmosphere. On the negative side, teachers complained of inadequate time, curriculum overload, teacher isolation and large classes.

Another study was done by the renowned researcher, professor Little (2005). It was a large scale study involving both developed and developing countries such as England, India, Sri Lanka and Zambia. The study was based on the consideration of learning and teaching in multigrade settings. Findings coincide with Mulryan-Kyne (2004), more especially on advantages. One unique advantage from her study was that teachers were able to organise both remedial and enrichment activities in multigrade settings. However, results reveal negative attitude, lack of incentives, lack of accommodation as some of the challenges teachers were facing. She concludes that there is need for increased awareness on multigrade teaching.

More recent 'mixed methods approach study' was conducted by Blum and Diwan (2007) in the rural schools of India. It was a case study describing small multigrade schools and increased access to primary education in India. Main findings reveal that teachers misunderstood the term 'multigrade' which made the concept not to receive great attention. There are also poor interactions between teachers and learners because of issues of caste, class and gender. Curriculum was also a problem as it was designed for a monograde class. Authors recommended for a needs assessment for multigrade schools.

There was yet another study commissioned by CREATE conducted by Little (2008). Although the study involved several countries, only the findings for Zambia will be highlighted. The study was about in-service training courses in multigrade schools.

Courses were developed and mounted in attempt to change approaches in the curriculum. Four piloted schools were sampled. As is the trend in other studies (Little 2001; 2002; 2005), Some problems identified were high teaching load, absence of special remuneration, lack of formal training and lack of independent learning due to lack of resources.

Much as several researchers are concerned with problems in multigrade schools, Mariono and Kirby (2009) conducted a study on achievement of students in multigrade classrooms. The study aimed at examining how students would have performed in a monograde classroom. This was quantitative study which provides reasons for the need to attach value to multigrade teaching. This study provides empirical evidence that teachers in multigrade classes are ill prepared and that multigrade teaching is demanding. Mariano and Kirby (2009) suggest that multigrade classrooms should be understood in order to come up with pros and cons of multigrade classes. Although this study seems not to link well with the purpose of this study, it is very important as it describes the learning environment which can lead to the success or failure of students in multigrade schools.

Other recent studies on qualitative work on multigrade teaching support the findings of the previous studies and outline a number of key themes. An exploratory study was carried out in rural Pakistan with the view of examining the possibilities of and challenges of implementing a multigrade teacher training course for teachers in rural schools. A study by Nawab and Baig (2011) involving four schools revealed that teachers were able to change approaches in teaching after implementing a course. Teachers changed the way they organised classes, arranged seating plan, displayed classroom charts and the way they organised activities. These findings are consistent with little (2008) who also, after implementing a course, teachers improved on the

practice. This study gives hope that if multigrade teaching is given the attention it deserves, it can improve access to education.

Guided by interpretive paradigm was a study by Taole and Mncube (2012). Their study was an investigation into experiences of educators in multigrade teaching in rural schools in the North West province and Northern Cape Province of South Africa. This was a qualitative research study for a period of four months using observation and interviews as methods for collecting data. Ten participants were involved. Four themes were identified, that is, lack of flexibility and integration in the curriculum, educators were not trained, inadequate resources and that teachers did not like to stay in rural schools.

Gichuhi (2014) also conducted a very interesting and unique study on multigrade teaching. This is the only study so far which targeted private schools. The purpose was to describe how multigrade has been used in pro-poor private schools, the challenges, policy implications and lessons learnt. It followed a descriptive survey design with a mixed method approach involving 39 teachers. Findings included lack of pre-service training, lack of support, lack of clear guidelines, curriculum was not flexible and time constraints. These findings relate with those of other authors more especially, Little (2008).

Latest studies on multigrade teaching in South Africa reveal the passion Taole (2014) has for the multigrade concept. The study was an investigation of primary school teaching of multigrade strategy in South African rural schools. It was a qualitative case study inquiry with two teachers in the sample. Data was collected through interviews. Main findings included teacher isolation, problems with class management and lack of resources. She recommended that teachers' role is central for effective teaching and learning in the multigrade classroom.

Just like Little (2001; 2002; 2007) Taole (2014) has emerged as one of the advocates of multigrade teaching in South Africa. In another recent study, ‘quality education for all: challenges of multigrade teaching in rural schools’, similar issues emerged. The study aimed at exploring challenges faced by multigrade teachers in South African rural schools. It was a descriptive qualitative case study. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. As in other studies, class management, lack of training and large classes are some of the challenges teachers were facing. She concludes that training remains the only viable option for teachers in multigrade schools.

## **2.7 Summary for literature review**

This chapter describes the concept of multigrade teaching and the theories that relate very well to the concept. All the sources read and studies reviewed agree that teachers are facing challenges in multigrade classes. The diversity in both the research designs followed and the setting of the studies is an indication that multigrade teaching remains a challenge in both developed and developing countries. Literature has indicated prevalence of multigrade teaching in Malawi but it seems no study has been conducted to establish challenges multigrade teachers are facing.

However, most of the studies reviewed were conducted in settings where multigrade is partially or fully recognised in which results might be different to a setting where multigrade is disguised. In addition, no study followed a phenomenological qualitative design so far. This study, therefore, attempted to establish that in their ignorance on the concept of multigrade teaching, teachers are likely to face challenges. The study will add to the scanty literature on multigrade teaching in Malawi and in the long run act as an eye opener in an attempt to address the challenges thereby achieving education for all.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, research methodology is presented. A detailed account of research design and research paradigm is outlined. It has the population, sample and sampling procedures. Methods of collecting data alongside the process of data analysis are also presented. Because this research was dealing with human beings, ethical considerations have also been mentioned. Measures to ensure validity of results have been highlighted. The very last part of the chapter presents themes that emerged from the study.

### **3.2 Research design**

This study followed a phenomenological qualitative research design. A phenomenological design studies a given phenomenon as experienced by those who live it (Ndengu, 2012). As for Groenewald (2004), a phenomenological research design aims at describing as accurate as possible, a phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the fact. Qualitative research design is a system of inquiry which seeks to bind a holistic narrative or description to inform the researcher's understanding of social or cultural phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). The researcher chose this design because the nature of the study was concerned with lived experiences of teachers. Exploring challenges faced by teachers in rural schools involve feelings, attitudes and experiences of teachers which may not be measured quantitatively. Secondly, phenomenological qualitative design allowed for exploration of the phenomenon in a natural setting. Multi-grade teaching can better be explored in a natural setting which the phenomenological qualitative design provides.

The third reason why the researcher considered qualitative design is that it allowed direct interaction with participants. The researcher collected data in person by



observing the behaviours and interviewing participants. Qualitative research is also flexible in the sense that it allowed the researcher to interpret data. Rich descriptions were needed to capture credible themes and develop them during data analysis. The researcher had the feeling that answers to the research questions were to come out mostly through critical interpretations from what was observed and heard.

Lastly, qualitative design was favoured because it allowed the researcher to build patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up approach (inductive process). This being an exploratory study, it was difficult to come up with pre-defined themes. The themes on the challenges teachers face were to emerge from the data analysis process.

### **3.2 Paradigm**

A paradigm is a loose connection of logically related assumptions, concepts and propositions that orient thinking in research. It is a collection of concepts, variables, and problems attached with corresponding methodology (Lindsay, 2009). The choice of the paradigm to guide this study was influenced by the nature of the problem under study. The study aimed at exploring challenges teachers in rural schools face when teaching multi-grade classes. To get a holistic picture of the challenges, there was need for the researcher to analyse situations critically on a practice which is not formalised, but seemingly the last resort in some rural schools.

Critical theory attempts to discover gaps or social inequalities in the community. The researcher was convinced that critical theory was to guide the study in terms of what techniques to use which could allow for meaningful interaction between the researcher and participants. Critical theory also guided in data analysis.

There are three main reasons why critical theory links well with multigrade teaching. The first reason is the attitude most education officials have towards multigrade

teaching. The researcher learnt with disappointment that many of them were in doubt of whether multigrade existed in Malawi or not. Confirming their doubts is a number of findings by researchers who have indicated that Malawi has not given room to multigrade because she claims the population is reasonable for monograde classes (Little, 2007 & Croft, 2004 ;) However, the fact that multigrade teaching is to a greater extent influenced by low enrolment is neglected. Critical theory therefore, was a better lens for the researcher to investigate the challenges.

The second reason is that critical theory was understood to link well with the quality of education offered in rural schools. Since quality education is dependent on effective and efficient teaching and learning, multigrade teaching without guidance could be a conduit for producing social inequalities in terms of the quality of education between learners in the urban and rural areas. In this respect, the theory informed the researcher about the importance of attaching value to education in rural areas where teaching and learning may not take place without practising the concept of multigrade. The goal was to engage the researcher in critical inquiry as to what challenges teachers in rural schools faced in offering education to the disadvantaged learners.

The last reason is that critical theory shows the context in which ‘assets’ in rural schools are utilised in an attempt to provide education. For teachers to teach in multigrade classes without guidelines as literature shows (Vincent, 2005), they are involved in critical thinking to teach multigrade classes. The theory therefore, informed the researcher that teachers use their creativity and innovativeness for them to teach the ‘demanding’ multigrade classes.

All in all, the theory empowered the researcher to analyse situations with a critical mind, that is, beyond what the positivism and interpretivism could offer. In a similar

manner, critical theory also empowered teachers to utilise all their assets, both tangible and intangible to handle multigrade classes.

### **3.3 Study area, population, sample, and sampling procedures**

#### **3.3.1 Study area**

The study was conducted in three selected primary schools in Lughesho zone, Misuku area in Chitipa district. Chitipa district is to the northern tip of Malawi and shares boundaries with Zambia to the west, Tanzania to the north and east and Karonga district to the south. Lughesho zone, which is in Misuku, is to the north east of Chitipa, 58 km from the Boma (Boma is a district headquarters). The area is hilly and travelling is a major challenge. This area was selected because it is one of the areas in the district where some schools are in the remotest areas. Precisely, all the three schools lie on the edge of Songwe River which is the boundary between Malawi and Tanzania. Chitipa district has 14 educational zones with Lughesho being one of them.

Since the researcher is a teacher trainer at Karonga Teachers' Training College, which is close to Chitipa district, proximity had to guide the choice of the study area. The study demanded areas which are hard- to- reach where multigrade schools could be found. Misuku area was found to have all the characteristics of areas where multigrade schools are found.

#### **3.3.2 Study population**

In this study, the population consisted of the Primary Education Advisor (PEA), all primary school teachers, all head teachers and all primary school learners in Lughesho zone in Chitipa district. Lughesho zone has 16 primary schools with 78 teachers. Of the

78, 50 are qualified teachers, 27 are temporary teachers and 1 is on contract (month to month basis).

### **3.3.3 Sample size and its characteristics**

Sampling is a process of selecting subjects to take part in a research investigation on the ground that they provide information considered relevant to the research problem (Oppong, 2013). It is a complex activity in qualitative research as involves a number of strategies to draw the sample (Coyne, 1997). A sample as described in qualitative research is a set of individuals selected from a population and usually is intended to represent the population in a research study. The selection was based on the characteristics of the area. These characteristics included the geographical position of the schools which make them hard to reach. Misuku is hilly and travelling is a major challenge. The schools were selected because they are in the remotest areas. Access to these schools is only by foot. The problem of teachers in these schools is severe due to its geographical position. This explains why multi-grade teaching has almost become a solution of last resort.

Of the 16 schools in the zone, three schools were sampled and these were Ngali, Ibabala and Sofwe. The distance between the schools is approximately 27 km. Out of 78 teachers in the zone, 10 teachers, 3 head teachers plus the Primary Education Advisor were involved in the study. These acted as key informants as they were involved in multigrade teaching. Out of the 14 participants, only two were female. Professionally, 8 of the participants were qualified while 5 were student teachers under training on distance mode (ODL students).

The sample of 14 participants was deemed adequate because by design, qualitative research requires a small group of participants to be investigated for a relatively long period of time in order to understand the problem in depth.

### **3.3.4 Sampling techniques**

Purposive sampling was suitable in this study. Purposive sampling is a technique of sampling in which the researcher uses their judgement in the selection of participants in relation to certain characteristics (Mertens, 2010). According to Michael (2008), purposive sampling is economical because it does not require a large sample. Looking at how demanding the study was in terms of travelling to hard-to-reach areas, the researcher thought few cases would be adequate. Since purposive sampling is flexible in terms of finding participants, both the zone and participants were selected purposively. Lughesho zone was selected because it has schools which had characteristics of multigrade teaching. The three schools targeted were selected because they had the lowest enrolment, least number of teachers (Appendix 8) and were practising multigrade teaching.

Participants were also selected purposively because only those teachers in multigrade schools could inform the researcher on the challenges they were facing. All teachers in multigrade classes were automatically selected. However, the driving force was not only the availability and willingness of the participants to participate, but on cases that were typical of the population selected as noted by Michael (2008).

Fully aware of the disadvantages of purposive sampling, one of them being failure to give equal chances to subjects in the population to be selected, participants were a good representation of sample. Participants were of diverse demographical attributes. Both

qualified and unqualified were included in the sample. In addition, lady teachers were also represented.

### **3.4 Data collection**

According to Michael (2008), data collection is a process of gathering relevant information about the subject from research participants. It is indeed a systematic process of collecting information using different instruments that the researcher deems suitable for the investigation. In this study, data collection was done using qualitative methods. These were interviews and observations. An interview guide was pretested before using it. The two methods are explained in detail below:

#### **3.4.1 Interviews**

Interviews were the main method of collecting data. As described by Kothari (2004), interviews involve a presentation of oral verbal stimuli and reply in terms of oral verbal responses. In administering interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was used (Appendix 1 & 2). The researcher opted for semi-structured interviews because they have the potential to inquire from the participant for greater detail within the interview process. In addition, the researcher has the opportunity to guide the participant if digression has been noted (Flick, 2002). Although semi-structured interviews may cause a problem of linking responses to the research question, the advantage side is greater because the subjects' view points are more likely to be expressed in a relatively open designed situation than in questionnaires and structured interviews.

The interview guide consisted of questions reflecting the research question in terms of planning for multigrade questions, professional support which they receive, teaching methods they use and classroom organisation. The questions were loosely structured so that participants were not restricted and at the same time helping the researcher to keep

focused on the objectives of the study. Because of the nature of the questions, the researcher was able to investigate the insight of the topic under study through probes and follow up questions.

Before conducting interviews, a consent form was signed by each participant (Appendix 6). Participants had to read the letter to agree or reject participation in the study. By good luck, all participants signed in agreement to participate in the study. This being a phenomenological qualitative study, the purpose of the study was explained but the critical research question was not revealed to them to avoid influencing their thinking as the design demands (Hollow Way, 1997 as cited in Groenewald, 2004). Participants were also assured of anonymity of responses during interviews. During the process of interviews, participants were asked to communicate in the language they felt comfortable. It followed that all participants chose to communicate in their native language except one who communicated competently in English. This gesture of leaving participants at liberty to choose the language of communication made participants feel relaxed and thereby providing the researcher with detailed information. However, communication in the native language did not cause any distortion in recording and translating information to English because the language that participants used happened to be the native language of the researcher.

A total of fourteen (14) participants were interviewed, these included three (3) head teachers, ten (10) teachers and one (1) Primary Education Advisor (PEA).

The researcher's role was asking questions, writing down responses in a notebook and recording each interview in a cell phone. Before recording, the researcher had to seek consent by explaining to them that recording was important for the purpose of

transcribing data. Interviews were conducted in an environment free from distractions which the head teachers provided so that participants were free to give responses without disturbance or intimidation. Interviews were scheduled for 30 minutes but all of them ended between 20 to 25 minutes. This implies that participants had enough time to express their views without time restrictions. In an attempt to probe more from participants, the researcher used probes such as *how, why, what else, any additions*, etc.

### **3.4.2 Observation**

Observation was another method for collecting data in this study. According to Ary et al (2006), observation serves the purpose of describing the behaviour in a specific natural setting. The type of observation employed was naturalistic observation which is conducted in a setting where behaviour ordinarily occurs and has not been arranged in any way for the purpose of recording data (Frick, 2002). The researcher was unobtrusive as possible and passively recorded whatever occurred. A checklist was developed in relation to the specific research questions. Using a checklist (Appendix 3), the researcher noted and recorded behaviour for a period of two weeks. All events that transpired during observation period were then recorded in a note book. During observations, the researcher also took photos (Appendix 7) of interesting events as supporting evidence for findings. Observations helped the researcher to triangulate information from interviews so as to establish challenges that teachers were facing in multigrade classes.

### **3.5 Trustworthiness**

To ensure the trustworthiness of findings, the researcher did the following:

- Engaged in a prolonged period of observation so as to have real insights of the problem under study



- Triangulated information from the two data sources; these were interviews and observation
- Continuously checked for representativeness of data fitness between coding categories and data
- Clarified researcher's bias throughout the process of data analysis
- Checked transcripts for obvious mistakes
- Documented all procedures
- Cross checked codes with experts
- Pilot tested data collection tools for improvement.

### **3.6 Data collection procedures**

The researcher followed a number of steps to collect data from participants. Before going into the data collection process, the researcher pretested data collection instruments on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2012 to allow for the refining of tools. The researcher then discussed them with a friend so that they had to collect the targeted data. It followed that other items which were missing were added in the instrument.

The researcher also sought permission from Mzuzu University through the coordinator of Masters Programme to conduct research in Chitipa Educational district. A letter of permission was granted copied to the District Education Manager (Chitipa), the Primary Education Advisor for Lughesho zone and head teachers for Ngali, Sofwe and Ibabala schools (Appendix 10)

Upon arrival at every school, the head teacher was served with a letter of permission (Appendix 10). The letter identified the researcher and explained the purpose of the study so that participants participated, in the study fully aware of what was involved.

At every school, data was collected first from interviews. The first to be interviewed were teachers in multigrade classes. These acted as key informants. Later, head teachers were interviewed and finally, the PEA. Each participant was interviewed individually. Lesson observations were conducted after interviews. The researcher observed lessons following the timetable with the aim of observing a variety of subjects.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Any research which involves people has ethical implications (Water-Adams, 2006).

The following were done to abide by research ethics:

- A letter of permission was sought from Mzuzu University to conduct research. This letter was copied to the DEM, PEA and head teachers of the sampled schools.
- Consent forms including a brief description of the study were signed by every participant so that they participated willingly.
- Right to anonymity and confidentiality was granted.
- Participants were given freedom to withdraw from the study if they wished to and if they did not want to respond to some questions.
- A consent form to allow dissemination of information to the professional community and use of photographs of teachers and learners in the research report was signed. The head teacher signed on behalf of all teachers while the chairperson and secretary of the school management committee signed on behalf of learners (Appendix 9).

### **3.8 Data processing and analysis**

#### **3.8.1 Data processing**

Data collected from individual interviews were recorded using a phone after seeking consent. However, permission was granted on condition that recordings were to be deleted immediately data was transcribed. As a way of backing up information in case of data loss of the recorded information, a record of jotted notes was kept in a notebook. Recorded data was then transcribed. Transcribing was about creating verbatim of the recorded data and typing interviews. After the initial transcription, the researcher played and replayed the recordings for five times to ensure accuracy of information gathered. In addition, data was edited continuously to ensure completeness. As for the data from observation checklists, they were recorded in a notebook.

#### **3.8.2 Data analysis for interviews.**

Analysis of data from interviews was done following a thematic approach. The researcher read interview transcripts to interpret data. In the course of reading data, attempts were made to identify possible themes and patterns as is expected in qualitative research. As observed by Ary et al. (2004), data analysis is the most complex and mysterious phase in qualitative research. It does not follow a linear process after data collection.

Each transcript was read to identify key points. The text was then formatted such that margins were used to identify individual bits of data. Codes in form of abbreviations were assigned as identifiers for cross-referencing. The text was re-read to identify items of interests and to allow for open coding. Categories were formed basing on the relationship of items. These categories were then organised into themes and sub-themes.

Data was then re-contextualised taking each theme separately and re-examining the original data. Examination was done so that no relevant data was overlooked. Data on each theme was presented on a table, each theme named, defined and having supporting data (Appendix 3: codes, categories and themes). Finally, the description of each theme was done illustrating it with a few quotations from the original text to help to communicate meaning.

An outline of themes and sub themes was as follows:

Theme 1: lack of training

Theme 2: negative attitude

Theme 3: lack of professional support

Sub theme 1: lack of orientation

Sub theme 2: lack of workshops or seminars

Theme 4: learner centred approaches are difficult to use

Sub theme 1: incomplete learners

Sub theme 2: monitoring learners

Sub theme 3: inadequate time

Sub theme 4: class size

Theme 5: general problems with classroom practice

Sub theme 1: planning

Sub theme 2: class management

Sub theme 3: class organisation

Sub theme 4: managing time

Sub theme 5: inadequate teaching and learning resources

Sub theme 6: high work load

Sub theme 7: overloaded curriculum

Theme 6: multigrade teachers employing and paying assistant teachers

Theme 7: poor education quality.

### **3.8.3 Data analysis for observations**

Checklists were analysed by reading through the notes to identify key points. These were recorded in a note book having two columns. One column contained the observations while the other column contained the researcher interpretation of the observations (Appendix 5).

Observations supplemented data from interviews. This data served the purpose of triangulating data during discussion of findings. Observations helped to verify responses given to questions during interviews.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

This study aimed at investigating challenges faced by teachers in rural schools as they teach multigrade classes. The study had set four questions, which the findings addressed. The first research question was to address knowledge and skills which teachers have for multigrade teaching, the second was on professional development activities offered to teachers for multigrade teaching, the third research question addressed teaching strategies which teachers use in multigrade classes. The last question was on major challenges that teachers themselves pronounced were facing when teaching multigrade classes.

Multigrade teaching as described in the literature review is a situation in which a teacher teaches more than one class at the same time either in one classroom or in different classrooms (Birch and Lilly, 1995). It is an effort made globally to address the problem of shortage of teachers in an attempt to achieve education for all. As emphasized by Vincent (2005), if teachers are not supported in terms of planning, staff development, materials and assessment procedures, multi grade teaching may have negative impacts on teaching and learning. In view of this, Mulkeen (2010) observes that Malawi has not done much to prepare teachers for this practice. Indeed the study unveiled a number of shortfalls. The following were the challenges that were unveiled following data analysis process.

Under the following specific research question: **What knowledge and skills do teachers have for multigrade teaching?** Lack of training and negative attitude came out as challenges teachers were facing.

## 4.2 Theme 1: Lack of training

The investigation has found evidence to show that teachers are not trained in multigrade teaching. Teachers said that multigrade teaching is not formal, as such it is their own initiative to practice it because there is no way out. Results indicated that lack of knowledge and skills in multigrade teaching is one of the challenges teachers face when teaching multigrade classes. Teachers revealed that they had never heard of multigrade teaching as a concept in their life time as teachers, not even at a teacher training college where they were. One teacher had this to say:

*I have been in this zone for ten years but I have not heard of multigrade teaching as such, but I have been combining classes. At this school it is occasional but at the previous school it was the order of the day.*

However, some teachers appeared to have some little knowledge on multigrade teaching as one of the strategies of arresting the problem of shortage of teachers. These were their views:

*We were told to practise double shifting in our zone since the problem of shortage of teachers is in all schools except for two. We tried it and we abandoned it because it is tiresome. That is where we started combining classes.*

These findings are in line with Ndalama and Chidalengwa (2008) cited in Steiner-Kamsi and Kunje (2011) who noted that in Malawi, multigrade is not well known as evident from their study where 41% of the teachers in the study indicated they had never heard of multigrade teaching. Findings are also consistent with Brown (2010) who asserts that most educational systems are training teachers in a monograde basis yet some of them find themselves in a hard task of combining classes.

### 4.3 Theme 2: Negative Attitude

Teachers were found to have negative attitudes towards multigrade teaching as they pretended not to have heard of multigrade teaching when they actually practised it. Head teachers confirmed that they had received a communiqué from District Education Manager's office that they had to combine classes to make a class of about 60 learners. They informed teachers and parents on the concept. Through interviews, it was revealed that teachers had the perception that they were being forced to practise multigrade teaching. These were some of their views:

*A circular came instructing us to combine classes. We were told that if we had a class of less than 60 learners, we had to combine with another class so that we had classes of at least 60 learners. We were briefed; parents were invited and were told of the new development. However, we feel the government is just imposing the practice of multigrade teaching on us. We are being told to combine classes a practice which very difficult to implement.*

These findings could imply most teachers were aware of multigrade but pretended not to know it probably because they did not like it. The findings are therefore in line with Mathot (2001) who discovered that most teachers have negative attitude towards multigrade teaching because it is more demanding compared to monograde. This could be one of the challenges since attitude has an effect on performance. Perhaps negative attitude which some teachers have developed towards multigrade teaching acts as a barrier to good practice of the concept.

The second research question that the study addressed was “**What professional support do teachers receive for multigrade teaching**”? The major theme which emerged was Lack of professional support.



#### **4.4 Theme 3: Lack of professional support**

Teachers mentioned that they were facing challenges in teaching multigrade classes. In spite of their situation that their teacher training course did not include the concept of multigrade, no professional support was offered to them. Teachers said the support that they lacked was in terms of orientation and workshops or seminars.

##### **4.4.1 Sub theme 1: Lack of Orientation**

Teachers were found not to have undergone any orientation to induce them in the practice of multigrade teaching. From both versions that were unveiled on knowledge and skills which teachers have on multigrade teaching, that is, they had not heard of it and that they received a circular, teachers agreed that they were not oriented on the best practice of multigrade teaching. The PEA complained:

*Yes a communication that teachers had to combine classes came but they were not oriented on how they should do it.*

The views from the PEA that teachers were not induced into the practice were supported by teachers themselves as follows:

*Yes, we were told that we have to combine classes and it ended there; no orientation was done at all.*

These findings depict that multigrade is not taken seriously, hence teachers in Lughesho zone were told to practice without orientation of some kind.

##### **4.4.2 Sub theme 2: Lack of workshops or seminars on multigrade teaching.**

Findings revealed that teachers never attended any continued professional development activities on how best they can practise multigrade teaching. In the absence of training and orientation, teachers said that CPDs in a form of workshops or seminars would

have assisted to have some basics of the concept, but were not being done. Teachers were really seen to be deficient of multigrade teaching. One teacher who had been in the practice for close to ten years said.

*There is no professional development either at the Teacher Development Centre (TDC) or school based. We just hear bits and pieces of information in passing from teachers of neighbouring schools*

The Primary Education Advisor agreed with the views of teachers saying that there was nothing he would do to support teachers on multigrade teaching because he was also blind of the concept. He confessed:

*It is difficult for me to support teachers on multigrade teaching. I don't know what it is all about.*

Results have established that teachers practise multigrade teaching without any support. These findings agree with what Mulkeen (2010) noted, that in spite of the widespread usage of multigrade teaching in Malawi, it is rarely integrated into policies of teacher education. Likewise, Kunje, Lewin and Stuart (2003) share the findings as they mention that there is prevalence of multigrade teaching in Malawi but without any support or guidelines.

In addressing the third research question '*What teaching Strategies do teachers use in multigrade classes*'? The theme that emerged was 'Learner centred approaches are difficult to use'.

#### **4.5 Theme 4: Learners Centred approaches are difficult to use**

Results indicated that teachers had difficulties to use learner centred approaches of teaching in multigrade classes. Teachers acknowledged that learner centred approaches

are very helpful as they can engage learners in self regulated learning. However, they registered failure to use these approaches during the process of teaching because of several reasons. These reasons have been discussed as sub themes:

#### **4.5.1 Sub theme 1: Incompetent learners**

Teachers said it was difficult to use learner centred approaches in multigrade classes because learners are incompetent. They claimed that learner centred approaches were not effective in multigrade classes because learners are unable to share ideas during group discussions due to their low thinking capabilities. According to teachers, most learners are not competent enough to work in groups. They are unable to express themselves as one teacher is quoted below:

*Even if I tell them to discuss in groups or pairs, they will not come up with anything. They are affected right away from standard one because of multigrade teaching.*

Classroom observations confirmed that teachers were not using participatory methods because only one teacher managed to use such approaches in one lesson. These findings came out uniquely in this study because from the literature review in general and specific studies read so far, nothing has been observed relating to the incompetence of learners in participatory methods. On the researchers' critical point of view, it is the negative attitude that they have towards multigrade teaching which makes them not use participatory methods.

#### **4.5.2 Sub theme 2: Monitoring learners**

Monitoring learners as they are doing learner centred activities was found to be another setback to using learner centred methods. During interviews, teacher complained that when they give learners tasks to work in groups and move to another class, learners stop doing the tasks and start fighting or making noise. However, during lesson

observations, teachers could leave a combined class to another class, which could wait for an opportune time. Claims that learners make noise were not evident. Perhaps learners are not used to working in groups because teachers seem not to be interested in using learner centred approaches.

#### **4.5.3 Sub theme 3: Inadequate time**

Teachers attributed their failure to use learner centred methods to inadequate time. Teachers said they prefer teacher centred methods to participatory methods because the former are time saving. Teachers wondered:

*How can you give activities to two classes, they discuss and report their findings within 30 or 35 minutes? It is very difficult!*

The general view is that teachers have the perception that Learner Centred Approaches are time consuming. During classroom observations a student teacher attempted to use learner centred methods in a Life Skills lesson. Learners enjoyed getting involved. It seems teachers themselves have problems to use such methods as opposed to their claim that learners are not able to participate.

There is a significant difference between these findings and those of other authors who assert the advantages of using learner centred methods in a multigrade class. For instance, Tsolakids, Sotriou and Koulouris (2005) and Berry (2005) claim that learner centred approaches save time because learners work independently, individually, in pairs and in groups. The teacher is a facilitator, therefore has more time to attend to all learners in a multigrade class. However, for learner centred approaches to work in a multigrade setting, activities need to be well selected, well prepared and at the same time well organised.

#### 4.5.4 Sub theme 4: Class Size

Teachers were also found to have challenges in using participatory approaches because the number of learners in their classes was very low. From observations, a class could have 11 learners which according to teachers was a disadvantage to them as they commented:

*In my class of 11, Standard 7 learners are only 5 while standard 8 learners are 6. This means a group is almost the whole class.*

It seems teachers equate learner centred approaches to having large groups neglecting the possibility of using pair work during lessons. Teachers seemed to defend themselves for not using learner centred approaches which they are supposed to employ even in a monograde class. The understanding of the researchers is that if a teacher had monograde class of 11 learners, they would still use learner centred approaches. Basing on the constructivism theories (Richardson, 2003), teachers must use learner centred methods to help learners construct knowledge on their own during lessons.

Teachers in multigrade schools really need to be assisted on methods of teaching to motivate learners who are already discouraged. They must understand the constructivism theory which compels them to come up with teaching methods which engage learners in activities.

The last research question was, **what do teachers say are the major challenges in multigrade teaching?** In addressing this research question, three themes emerged. General problems with classroom practice, multigrade teachers employing and paying supporting teachers and poor education quality.

#### **4.6 Theme 5: General problems with classroom practice**

It was learnt that teachers had general problems with classroom practice. Teachers faced challenges in a number of areas beginning from the planning phase to the implementation phase of lessons in multigrade classes. This theme is discussed in a number of sub themes.

##### **4.6.1 Sub theme 1: Planning.**

Teachers expressed that it was difficult to prepare schemes of work and write lesson plans for two classes. They indicated that it was normal for them, sometimes, to teach without schemes of work and lesson plans. One teacher complained:

*It is burden to write schemes of work and lesson plans for two classes , I do write detailed schemes of work for one class, for the other class, schemes are sketchy or no schemes at all. Serious teaching is only on Monday because preparation is done during weekends. As for the other days, sometimes I teach without lesson plans. It is not easy to prepare for two classes. I do not fear anyone, the work is tough. If they want to dismiss me, let them do. I do not care.*

Findings from lesson observations confirmed what teachers expressed during interviews. During classroom observations it was noted that planning was intensified in one class. In a standard one and two multigrade class, a teacher had well prepared schemes of work and lesson plan for standard 2. As for Standard 1, he had nothing. This is how the teacher defended himself:

*Standard two is the class which I am allocated, standard one is an extra class. That is why I prepare very well for my class. As for standard one I give them activities to keep them busy.*

Perhaps Head teachers did not make it clear to teachers that they are formally allocated two classes so that they prepare for both. These findings are in tandem with the Commonwealth (2005) report which emphasises that if teachers are to teach multigrade classes effectively, materials from the curriculum need to be carefully selected and modified. It could be this thematic approach to planning for multigrade lessons that teachers are lacking.

#### **4.6.2 Sub theme 2: Class management**

Teachers mentioned that class management was difficult in multigrade classes, especially when classes were large and separated. Although they were using class leaders to manage fellow learners, their experience was that class leaders were underrated by the other learners. These were their views in general:

*It is difficult to manage learners in two different classes. Even if I ask class leaders to help, other learners underrate them. When I'm in one class, learners in the other class make noise.*

Although these findings are consistent with those of Taole (2012), when I triangulated their arguments through lesson observation, class management seemed not to be a challenge. At one school, which is a pure multigrade school (each teacher had two grades in one classroom but had also to teach some subjects in the other two classes which had no teacher) learners were well managed. Although the teachers could teach one class the whole period and switch to another class the other period, learners remained quiet, waiting for their turn, gazing at their friends learning (Appendix 7(b&d) pictures 3 & 7). Perhaps class management could really be a problem if classes are large as indicated by one teacher who asserted that managing learners becomes a challenge only when the class is large.

### **4.6.3 Sub theme 3: Class Organization**

Lesson observations revealed that teachers used two strategies to organize learners. Learners could either face one direction (both classes facing the teacher positioned in front) or they faced different directions (one grade given an activity facing a different direction while the other class faces the teacher). During interviews it was revealed that teachers did not really know when learners had to face one direction or when they had to face different directions; when the grades had to integrate for common activities and when grades had to do tasks separately. This is what the teachers said:

*I do not know how to do it, when both grades face one direction, they disturb one another, on the other hand when they face different directions it is an inconvenience for me to monitor them. However, facing in different directions is more convenient but only if we had two chalkboards in a classroom or portable boards.*

These findings relate to Dima and Borcos (n.d) who highlight that classroom organization is a critical factor in predicting positive learning environment in a multigrade class. Findings also agree with Suzuki's (2009) patterns of multigrade classroom organisation (Figure 1). Patterns 1 and 2 were multigrade in implicit dominated. Pattern three, which is more of multigrade was observed only in one lesson. Perhaps teachers were not oriented on how best they can organize multigrade classes.

### **4.6.4 Sub theme 4: Managing Time**

It was noted that all lessons finished after the prescribed time i.e. after 30 minutes in infant classes and after 35 minutes in junior and senior classes. The general views held by teachers were that time management is a major challenge because it is difficult to utilize 35 minutes for two classes effectively. Rarely did they finish content and slow learners were not assisted. Below are their general views:



*Time factor is one of the major challenges. It is a big problem to teach two classes, give written exercises, mark them and at the same time assist slow learners. All lessons for the day are affected because I need more time to finish the work. This results in not finishing the work for the day and in the long run not finishing the syllabus, this is why learners in the higher classes have to come back for afternoon lessons in an attempt to finish the work.*

These findings are consistent with Gichuhi (2014) who also observes that time factor is one of the major challenges in multigrade classes. However, from the researcher's critical point of view, perhaps this is as a result of the attitude teachers have towards multigrade teaching. From lessons observed, teachers had multigrade classes of learners ranging from 12 to 30 (Appendix 6) which could not really cause problems to mark their work within 35 minutes.

#### **4.6.5. Sub theme 5: Inadequate teaching and learning resources**

Lack of resources was noted as one of the challenges teachers face when teaching multigrade classes. Observations revealed that teachers lacked both teachers' guides and learners' books. In an interview, teachers revealed multigrade classes needed more resources than a mono-grade class would require. An ODL student teacher who besides being on training happens to combine Standard 3 and 4, complained:

*There are few teachers' guides for standard 4. Of the eight learning areas, I only have three. Teaching and learning is affected as at times I am not sure of what to teach. Learner's books are also not enough. It becomes difficult to give learners work as you switch on to another class.*

During observation, it was indeed noted that each learner needed a learner's book for individual work as the teacher switched on to another class. Teachers stated that they

needed enough text books for every learner so that the teaching and learning process is not disturbed. Perhaps this is really a problem where the class is large, such that learners can make noise as they scramble for the few textbooks.

However, teachers admitted that multigrade is convenient in rural schools where enrolment is low if only there are enough resources like textbooks, supplementary readers and portable boards. These findings are in line with Vincent (2005) who mentions that teachers cannot teach multigrade classes well if they are not supported with materials. It implies that learners need more resources for self regulated learning.

#### **4.6.6 Sub theme 6: High teaching load**

The study revealed that teachers in multigrade schools had high workloads but without incentives. Interviews revealed that some multigrade schools were also practising double shifting. Teachers mentioned that Standards 6, 7 and 8 learners come in the afternoon to finish the remaining subjects which were not covered in the morning. Despite their high workloads and their efforts to work in such demanding situations, teachers said they are not given extra pay to motivate them to work. Teachers expressed the following during interviews:

*Multigrade teaching is as good as double shifting, therefore I need more pay for extra work I am doing, otherwise teaching two classes at a time is not a joke.*

Perhaps these teachers wanted payment for teaching two classes at a time and not necessarily for the afternoon classes. The PEA indicated very clearly that teachers in his zone refused the K5, 000 extra pay which the Ministry had allocated to all teachers in schools which had double shifts. These findings could also mean that teachers do not know the differences between double shift and multigrade teaching. This knowledge gap may have some negative effects on teacher performances in multigrade teaching.

Teachers also mentioned that the curriculum was overloaded contributing to their high workloads. They suggested that the curriculum should be modified to suit multigrade schools because teachers struggle to finish the syllabi for all subjects.

These results are consistent with those of Little (2008), who also found high teaching load and absence of special remuneration as challenges facing multigrade teaching. The researcher is also in support that multigrade teachers need extra pay to motivate them.

#### **4.7 Theme 6: Multigrade teachers employing and paying assistant teachers.**

During interviews, one unique response emerged from the discussions. Teachers revealed that they employ supporting teachers to teach some classes. Although the School Management Committee (SMC) took a leading role in this task, sometimes the committee could not employ enough assistant teachers. It was at this point that teachers employed the others thereby taking responsibility of paying them. This is how teachers lamented during interviews:

*More teachers should be supplied and evenly distributed in the zone. We were four but one of us was posted away. We have no choice but to find an assistant teacher to take care of his classes. We pay him from our own pockets. It is a punishment to be at a multigrade school. Apart from the burden of teaching two classes, I also contribute K1, 000 every month as payment for the assistant teachers. From our little salaries, it is not easy to part away with K1, 000.*

Head teachers also expressed disappointment on teachers taking responsibility of employing assistant teachers on behalf of the government as they revealed during interviews:

*We are both employees and employers. We employ assistant teachers to help us with the extra classes after sharing two per teacher. These assistant teachers are sometimes*

*paid by the school management committee and at times by us. We are told there is a programme that will be supporting these teachers, but when will it come? The government has neglected multigrade schools and left the responsibility of the employer to us.*

In an interview with the Primary Education Advisor (PEA), it was confirmed that qualified teachers pay for supporting teachers because there are no monitoring strategies as far as multigrade teaching is concerned. The PEA confessed during interviews:

*Teachers are facing many challenges in their schools because there is no follow up on the concept multigrade teaching. Since both approaches are a challenge (double shifting and multigrade) all the schools in my zone (except two) have resorted to employing supporting teachers. These teachers are paid by the school management committee (SMC) but sometimes qualified teachers are responsible for their payment.*

Perhaps the Ministry of education does not really care on how best teaching and learning has to go about in these schools or is not yet aware of the constraints teachers are facing in multigrade schools.

#### **4.8 Theme 7: Poor education quality.**

Teachers complained that learners in multigrade schools are generally not good in class because their learning is affected right away from standard one. Despite their efforts, learners cannot have the best. Teachers said that the end product in the primary leaving certificate reveals that learners in multigrade school have a limit beyond which they cannot go. Although head teachers have the expertise to allocate teachers to classes in multigrade schools, the gap is too wide to be filled. For example, at a school of five teachers (three qualified and two student teachers), qualified teachers were in standard

one and two, three and four were allocated to student teachers, 5, 6 and 7 to supporting teachers and 8 to a qualified teacher. The perception of teachers was that learners cannot do well because of this approach of allocating teachers. The Head teacher confirmed:

*Learners from multigrade schools can hardly write a composition as a result they can hardly be selected to boarding secondary schools. Quality education in rural schools such as these is a non-starter. Education for all is a myth in multigrade schools. We cannot compare the performance of learners in schools which are fully staffed and these multigrade schools. **Awana Wakiwite.** (Learners are affected such that even if teachers work hard in standard eight, they cannot improve much).*

Perhaps what is learnt from this is that teachers are projecting the problem of poor performance to learners only. On the other hand, it could be failure to handle multigrade classes properly which yields poor performance.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.**

### **5.1 Summary of findings**

The aim of the study was to investigate challenges faced by teachers in rural schools as they teach multigrade classes in three primary schools in Lughesho zone in Chitipa district. The summary is presented in relation to the critical research question of the study.

Teachers have no knowledge about multigrade teaching because they are not trained. In spite of their ignorance, teachers are not oriented on teaching these classes. Worse enough, teachers never had continued professional development workshops to keep them informed on multigrade teaching. What follows is that teachers lack appropriate skills for multigrade teaching, making the practice a challenge to them. Because they are practicing multigrade in their own way, they find it very difficult hence, the negative attitude that they have developed.

Classroom practice was another challenge teachers are facing. They found it a challenge to prepare schemes of work and lesson plans for the two grades in a multigrade class. It was for this reason that planning was largely on one class. The class which they thought was an 'extra class' was not planned for. Teachers also faced challenges in using participatory approaches in the classroom because they claimed they are time consuming. With the high workloads which they have, they found learner centred methods to be more convenient. This implies that the constructivist theory which is meant to be more suitable in a multigrade setting is not applied. In addition, resources are not adequate to the extent that teachers teach without teachers guides. They do not know what to teach sometimes and they do not finish the syllabus. As a result, the process of teaching and learning is doubted.

In view of the challenges explained, teachers have resorted into finding solutions to some of the challenges on their own. They employ assistant teachers with the help of School Management Committee (SMC). In some cases, this has become a problem instead of a solution because of two reasons. Firstly, assistant teachers are not trained and thus affecting the teaching and learning process. Secondly, assistant teachers are sometimes paid by multigrade teachers.

The end product of all these challenges faced by multigrade teachers is poor quality of education in multigrade schools. Learners from these schools are hardly selected to boarding secondary schools not because they are not capable, but because of the implications of a multigrade school.

Formalizing multigrade teaching in rural schools and addressing the challenges unveiled could make multigrade teaching a better practice in rural schools.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

What emerged from this study is that teachers face a number of challenges as they teach multigrade classes. These challenges are mostly in planning and classroom practice.

The study revealed that teachers lack knowledge and skills on multigrade teaching and therefore they teach multigrade classes on a trial and error basis. This could be attributed to negligence on the part of Ministry of Education to attach value to multigrade teaching on one part and negative attitude of teachers towards multigrade teaching on the other.

Challenges in multigrade teaching however, can be addressed when multigrade teaching is formalised or when all schools can have enough teachers to support a monograde system.

### *Theorising the study*

Guided by the asset based theory, the understanding of the researcher is that there are a number of assets in rural schools which include teachers, classrooms, assistant teachers and the school management committee, among others. All these assets are contributing to access to education in rural schools. However, these assets are unable to bring the best of multigrade schools because of a number of challenges. As noted by Roots (2011), assets need to be identified and managed in an attempt to address problems in rural communities. The study therefore concludes that challenges in multigrade schools can be addressed if multigrade teachers as key assets are well informed on the practice.

The researcher therefore suggests three implications for multigrade teaching in rural schools. The first one is that access and quality education in multigrade schools can be achieved if multigrade schools and multigrade teachers are identified. Multigrade teachers should be recognised to get motivated. Teachers should be given the required materials and professional support. Secondly, multigrade teachers should be considered as key assets which can act as an igniting power to involve all other assets in the community, whether tangible or intangible. If given professional support, teachers are well placed in involving other assets in the community, for example, teaching and learning resources. Lastly, multigrade teaching must be monitored at all educational levels, which are: national, division, district and zone level.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

In general, findings have revealed that multigrade teaching is a non-defined concept in the Malawian context which subjects teachers to a number of challenges in the process of teaching and learning. To a large extent, challenges are due to lack of training and to a lesser extent, lack of resources and negative attitude which teachers have towards the concept. The researcher therefore makes following recommendations:



- It was also noted that there was no follow up on how teachers were fairing with the practice of multigrade to the extent that they were finding solutions on their own, for example, by employing and paying supporting teachers who contribute to low quality of education in multigrade schools. The researcher recommends that the government of Malawi through the Ministry of Education should organise a survey so that multigrade schools are identified. As of now, Malawi seems to be in a state of denial as regards multigrade teaching.

After identification of schools, monitoring procedures should be put in place to check if there is need to supply more teachers to the schools or support the available teachers to teach multigrade classes effectively.

- It has been revealed that teachers are facing a number of challenges as they teach multigrade classes because they are not trained. The researcher recommends that the Ministry of Education through the Department of Teacher Education and Development should prepare modules on multigrade teaching which should act as guidelines in all schools which are naturally prone to the practice because of low enrolment and understaffing.

The government would perhaps take advantage of ODL students who by design of their training, are supposed to teach in their home areas which are rural. Their training should include a full multigrade course. Following the development of modules, an orientation course will have to be implemented for the proper practice of the concept.

- It has also been established that teachers are not provided with school or zone based seminars on how best multigrade teaching should be practised. The researcher recommends that Continued Professional Development (CPD)

should be emphasized. Since multigrade calls for creativity both in planning and teaching, teachers must therefore meet regularly at school and zone level to share experiences on how best they can teach multigrade classes.

- It was also revealed that teachers found it a challenge to use learner centred approaches in multigrade classes. The researcher recommends that teachers be sensitized on the importance of using learner centred approaches. Teachers must learn the constructivist theory as one of the theories which helps learners to learn on their own, with minimal supervision, in order to curb the problem of time.
- It was learnt that teachers did not finish the syllabi for the classes. The researcher recommends that teachers follow a thematic approach in planning schemes of work and lesson plans.
- It was also revealed that teachers had negative attitudes towards multigrade teaching, hence did not teach effectively. The researcher recommends that teachers should be provided with incentives in form of ‘extra pay’ so as to cultivate positive attitudes in them.

#### **5.4 Areas of further research.**

1. A survey (study) to establish the prevalence of multigrade teaching in Malawi.
2. The same research should be conducted on a wide scale.
3. A comparative study on performance of learners between multigrade and monograde classes.

## REFERENCES

- Aghazadeh, M. (2004). *Learning and teaching in multigrade teaching*. Available at [multigrade.ioe.ac.uk](http://multigrade.ioe.ac.uk)
- Anita, P. (2007). *Overview of reported methods of teaching multi-grade classes in the developing world*. Available at <http://www.google.com>
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L.C., & Razavieh, A. (2006). *Introduction to research in education (6<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Belmont CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Barrett, A.M., Ali, S., Clegg, J., Hinostroza, J.E., Lowe, J., Nickel, J. et al (2007). *Initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning: A review of recent literature*. Available at [www.ceppe.cl/images/stories/recursors](http://www.ceppe.cl/images/stories/recursors)
- Benvenite, L., Marshall, J. & Aranjó, M.A. (2008). *Teaching in Cambodia*. Available at [worldbank.org](http://worldbank.org)
- Berry, C. (n.d.). *Multi-grade teaching: A discussion document*. Available at [info.worldbank.org](http://info.worldbank.org)
- Beukes, F. (2006). *Managing the effects of multi-grade teaching on learners' performance in Namibia*. Available at <http://ujdispace.uj.ac.za>
- Birch, I., & Lally, M. (1995). *Multi-grade teaching in primary schools*. Bangkok: UNESCO.
- Blum, N. & Diwan, R. (2007). *Small multigrade schools and increasing access to primary education India*. Available at [sro.sussex.ac.uk](http://sro.sussex.ac.uk)
- Bray, M. (2008). *Double shift schooling*. Available at [onlinelibrary.wiley.com](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)

- Cash, T. (2000). *'Multi-grade teaching' school of lifelong education and international development. Institute of education.* Available at [www.3rs.org.za](http://www.3rs.org.za)
- Chaka, T., & Webner, E. (2012). *Education development and support for multi-grade classes.* Available at [www.hsrc.ac.za/en/review/september-2011/multigrade-teachers](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/review/september-2011/multigrade-teachers)
- Chiboole, M. (2011). *Making a mark with feeder schools.* Available at <http://www.actionaid.org>
- Collins, S.R. (2008). *Enhancing student learning through applied constructivist theory.* Available at [kwantlen.ca/TD/TD.../TD.2.2-collins-applied-constructivist-theory.p](http://kwantlen.ca/TD/TD.../TD.2.2-collins-applied-constructivist-theory.p)
- Commonwealth Secretariat (2005). *Multigrade teaching programme volume two.* Available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)
- Coyne, I.T. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research. Purposeful and theoretical sampling: merging or clear boundaries. *Journal of advanced nursing* 26, 623-630. Available at [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Croft, A. (2007). *Prepared for diversity? Teacher education for lower primary classes in Malawi.* Available at [sussex.ac.uk](http://sussex.ac.uk)
- Cube, N.M. (2012). *Effective teaching in multigrade schools.* Available at [2012teacherconvention.com](http://2012teacherconvention.com)
- Dana, C. (n.d.). *Practices worth of attention. Asset-based instruction.* Available at [www.utdanacenter.org](http://www.utdanacenter.org)

- Drost A.W, Magee, L.T & Mdekazi, J.N. (1999). *An investigation of multigrade classroom practices in the SEJ*. Available at [jet.org.za](http://jet.org.za)
- Ebernsohn, L., & Eloff, I. (2006). Identifying asset-based trends in suitable programmes which support vulnerable children. *South African journal of education* 26 (3), 457-472. Available at [www.ajol.info/index.php/sage/article/viewfile/25082](http://www.ajol.info/index.php/sage/article/viewfile/25082)
- Ebernsohn, L., & Mbetse, D.J. (2003). Exploring community strategies to career education in terms of asset-based approach: Expanding existing career theory and models of intervention. *South African journal of education* 23 (4), 223-327. Available at [www.ajol.info/index.php.sage/article/viewfile/25080](http://www.ajol.info/index.php.sage/article/viewfile/25080)
- Education Sector Implementation Plan (2008). *Towards quality education. The National Sector Implementation Plan 2009-2013*. Available at [planpolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Malawi/Malawi/ESIP-FINAL.pdf](http://planpolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Malawi/Malawi/ESIP-FINAL.pdf)
- Eloff, I., & Ebernsohn, L. (2001). *The implication of an asset-based approach to early intervention*. Available at <http://respository.up.ac.za>
- NESP (2009). *Towards quality education. The National Education Sector Plan 2009-2013*. Available at [planipolis.iiep.unesco.org](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org)
- Flick, U. (2002). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE.
- Geoff, P. (2009). *Evidence based teaching. A practical approach*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes.
- Gichuhi, L.W. (2014). Multigrade teaching and learning in pro-poor private schools: Nyeri country. *Scholarly journal of education* vol 3(8), 109-113. Available at <http://www.scholarly-journals.com/SJE>

- Goldon, E.E. (2005). *Peer tutoring-A teachers resource guide*. Available at <http://books.google.com>
- Gravetter, F. & Forzano, L.B. (2009). *Research Methods for Behaviour Sciences (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Wards worth
- Greonewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International journal of qualitative methods* 3 (1) article 4. Available at <http://www.ualberta.ca>
- Hargreaves, E., Montero, C., Chau, N., Sibli, M. & Thanh, T. (2001). Multi-grade teaching in Peru, Sri Lanka and Vietnam: An overview. *International Journal of Educational Development* 21, 499-620. Available at <http://www.nied.edu.na/multi-grade>
- Hart, C. (2005). *Doing your masters dissertation*. Los Angeles CA: SAGE.
- Heijker E.L. (2012). *Evaluation study of teachers' views and practices towards education quality, the implementation and outcomes of the World Teachers Programme in Embangweni Area, Malawi*. Available at [dspace.library.uu.nl](https://dspace.library.uu.nl)
- Henderson, J.G. (1992). *Reflective teaching becoming an inquiry educator*. New York: Macmillan.
- InWent (2008). *Learner-centred education*. University of Cologne.
- Juvane, (2005). *Redefining the role of multi-grade teaching*. Available at [www.fao.org/sd/erp/.../multi-grade-fao](http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/.../multi-grade-fao)
- Kamel Shreen Abd el Razek (2012). *Multigrade education: Application and teacher preparation in Egypt*. Available at [dar.aucegypt.edu](http://dar.aucegypt.edu)

- Katijaita, M.U. (2011). *Teachers' and students perceptions of double session schooling on ordinary level students' performance in geography*. Available at [www.ijird.com](http://www.ijird.com)
- Kothari, C.R. (2004). *Research methodology: methods and techniques (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. New Delhi: New Age International Limited
- Kretzmann, J.P. & Mcknight, J.L. (1993). *Building communities from inside out: A path towards finding and mobilizing community's asset (1)*. Available at [www.abcdinstitute.org](http://www.abcdinstitute.org)
- Kubwalo, K. (2011). *UNICEF unveils plans to build a teacher training college*. Available at [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org).
- Kunje, D., Keith, L., & Stuart, J. (2003). *Primary teacher education in Malawi: Insight into practice and practice and policy: Multi-site teacher education research projects (MUSTER)*. England: University of Sussex.
- Linden, T. (2001). *Double shift secondary schools: Possibilities and issues*. Available at [siteresources.worldbank.com](http://siteresources.worldbank.com)
- Lindsay, M. (2009). *The philosophical underpinnings of educational research*. Available at [www.ritsumel.ac.jp](http://www.ritsumel.ac.jp)
- Little, A.W. (2001). *Access and achievement in commonwealth countries: Support for learning and teaching in multi-grade classrooms*. Available at <http://www.google.com>
- Little, A.W. (2001). Multi-grade teaching: Towards an international research and policy agenda. *International journal of educational development* 21, 481-497. Available at [www.nied.edu.na/multi-gradeteaching](http://www.nied.edu.na/multi-gradeteaching)

- Little, A.W. (2004). *Learning and teaching in multi-grade settings. Paper prepared for UNESCO 2005 EFA monitoring report.* Available at <http://angellawlittle.net>
- Little, A.W. (2005). *Learning and teaching in multigrade settings.* Available at [portal.unesco.org](http://portal.unesco.org)
- Little, A.W. (2007). *Education for all and multi-grade teaching: Challenges and opportunities.* Available at <http://books.google.com/books/about/Education-for-All>
- Little, A.W. (2008). *Increasing access through multigrade teaching and learning. Policy brief number 5.* Available at <http://www.education.lu.se>
- Little, A.W. (2009). *Multi-grade teaching challenges and opportunities.* Available at <http://www.create-rpc.org>
- Loots, M.C. (2011). *Teachers implementation an asset-based intervention for school-based psychology.* Available at <http://upetd.up.ac.za>
- Mariano, L.T. & Kirby S.N. (2009). *Achievement of students in multigrade classrooms.* Available at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)
- Mathot, G.B. (2001). *A handbook for teachers of multigrade classes Vol. one. Improving performance at the primary level.* Available at <http://Unesdoc.unesco.org>.
- Maxim, G.W. (1995). *Social studies and the elementary school child (5<sup>th</sup> ed.).* New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.
- McGinnis, N., & Borden, A.M. (1992). *Better education for all. A Bridges manual for managers and policy makers. Harvard Institute for International Development.* Available at <http://pdf.usaidgov/pdf-docs/PNABP372.pdf>.



- McWan, P. (1998). The effectiveness of multigrade schools in Colombia. *International journal development vol. 18(16)*, 435-452
- Mckeachie, W.J., & Svinicki, D. (2004). *Teaching tips. Strategies, research and theory for college and university teachers*. Houghton Muffin: Boston.
- Mertens, D.M. (2005). *Research and evaluation in education psychology. Integrating diversity with qualitative and quantitative and mixed methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Michael, S.O. (2008). *Using motivational strategy as panacea for employee retention and turnover in selected public and private sector organisations in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa*. Available at [ufh.netd.ac.za](http://ufh.netd.ac.za)
- Miller, B. (1999). *Teaching and learning in the multi-grade classroom: Students performance and institutional routines*. ERIC digests. Available at <http://www.ericdigest.org>
- Mulkeen, A. (2010). *Teachers in Anglophone Africa. Issues in teacher supply, training and management*. Available at [worldbank.org](http://worldbank.org)
- Mulkeen, A., & Chen, D. (2008). *Teachers for rural schools*. Washington D.C: The World Bank.
- Mulryan-Kyne, C. (2004). Teaching and learning in multigrade classes. What teachers say. *The Irish journal of education vol 35*. 5-9. Available at <http://www.nied.edu.na>
- Mulryan-Kyne, C. (2006). *The preparation of teachers for multi-grade teaching*. *Teaching and teacher education 23*, 501-514

- Multi-grade Education Conference (2010). *Generic education multi-grade policy, multi-grade implementation and optimization strategy workshop*. Available at <http://www.adeanet.org>
- Muthayan, S. (1999). *A case study of multi-grade teaching in Canada: Implication for South Africa*. Available at <http://emprint.ur.ac.za/2458/1/>
- National Education Sector Plan (2008). *National Education Sector Plan 2008-2017. A statement of ministry of education and technology*. Available at [www.scotland-malawipartnership.org](http://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org)
- Nawab, A. (2011). The possibilities and challenges of multigrade teaching in rural Pakistan. *International journal of business and social science vol. 2 no 15*. Available at <http://educationnorthwest.org>.
- Ndengu, D.M. (2012). *Designing and conducting qualitative research: A guide for post graduate students in the social sciences*. Luwanga: Mzuni press.
- Nelson, B., Campbell, J., & Emmanuel, J. (2011). *Development of methods for asset-based working*. Available at [policynutshell.com/2012](http://policynutshell.com/2012)
- Oppong, S.T. (2013). The problem of sampling in qualitative research. *Asian Journal of management sciences in education. Vol.2 no.2*. Available at [www.ajnmse.leenaluna.co.jp](http://www.ajnmse.leenaluna.co.jp)
- O'Leary, T., Burkett, I., & Braithwaite, K. (2010). *Appreciating Assets*. Available at <http://www.careojeuktrust.org.uk>
- Olivier, T., Wood, L. & Lange, N. (2009). *Picturing hope: In the face of poverty as seen through the eyes of teachers*. Available at <http://books.google.mw>

- Ornstein, A.C., & Levine, D.U. (1994). *Foundations of education (9<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Houghton Mifflin: Boston.
- Panitz, T. (1996). *A definition of collaborative vs cooperative learning*. Available at [www.londenmetal.uk](http://www.londenmetal.uk).
- Petty, G. (1998). *Teaching today (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. Nelson Thornes: Cheltenham.
- Punch, K.F. (2005). *Introduction to research methods in education*. Los Angeles: SAGE
- Richardson, V. (2003). Constructivist pedagogy. *Teachers college record* 105 (9), 1623- 1640. Available at [cclp.mior.ca](http://cclp.mior.ca)
- Ryan, H. (2008). *Exploring the Asset Based Approach with a learner with affected by disability and HIV and AIDS*. Available at [scholar.sun.ac.za](http://scholar.sun.ac.za)
- Shaked, A. (2010). *Creating a bridge between deficit-based and strength-based problem solving: The journey of six sigma*. Available at [www.almond-insight.com/.../building-a-bridge-between-AI-and-Lean-si...](http://www.almond-insight.com/.../building-a-bridge-between-AI-and-Lean-si...)
- Smith, B.L. & Macgregor, J.T. (1992). *What is collaborative learning?* Available at [evergreen.edu.docs](http://evergreen.edu/docs)
- Steiner-Kamsi, G. & Kunje, D. (2011). *Teacher reforms around the world. Implementation and outcomes*. Available at <https://books.google.com>
- Takako, S. (n.d.). *Multi-grade teaching training in Nepal: Diversity of practice and impact on training*. Available at <http://www.research.kobe-acjp/gsics-publication/jics/suzuki-16-s.pdf>
- Taole, M.J. & Mncube, V.S. (2012). Multigrade Teaching and Quality of Education in South Africa: Educators Experiences. *Stud Tribes Tribal* 10 (2), 151-162. Available at [www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za)

Taole, M.J. (2014). *Multigrade Teaching: A daunting Challenge for Rural Teachers*.

Available at [www.krepublishers.com](http://www.krepublishers.com)

Taole, M.J. (2014). Quality Basic Education for All: Challenges in Multigrade teaching in rural schools. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences Vol 5. No 1*.

Available at [www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za)

United Nations Education Scientific and Culture Organisation (1995). *Managing schools for better quality: Multi-grade teaching and school cluster. Report of joint UNICEF/UNESCO/SEAMES Workshops 28 November-2<sup>nd</sup> December 1994*. Bangkok: UNESCO. Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org>

United Nations International Children Education Fund (1998). *Free Primary Education. The Malawi experience 1994-1998. A policy analysis study conducted by MOES & C in collaboration with UNICEF*.

Veenman, S. (1996). *Effects of multigrade and multi-age classes*. Available at [rer.sagepub.com](http://rer.sagepub.com)

Vincent, S. (Ed.) (1995). *The multi-grade classroom: A resource handbook for small rural schools*. Available at <http://educationnorthwest.org>

Water-Adams, S. (2006). *Chapter 12: Teacher research and action research* (e.v). pp 255-271. Available at [www.sagepub.com](http://www.sagepub.com)

Wiseman, D.L., Knight, S.L. & Cooner, D.D. (2005). *Becoming a teacher in a field-Based setting*. Canada: Thomson Wadsworth.

## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1: Interview guides for multigrade teachers**

- 1. What knowledge and skills do you have on multigrade teaching?**
  
2. What kind of professional development do you receive for multigrade teaching in terms of:
  - a. Planning?
  - b. Classroom organisation?
  - c. Class management?
  - d. Instructional strategies?
  - e. Teaching and learning resources?
  
3. What teaching strategies do you use when teaching multigrade classes?
  
4. What challenges do you face in multigrade classes in terms of:
  - a. Planning?
  - b. Classroom organisation?
  - c. Class management?
  - d. Instructional strategies?
  - e. Teaching and learning resources?
  - f. Others?

**APPENDIX 2: Interview guides for headteachers and Primary Education  
Advisor (PEA)**

1. What knowledge and skills do you have on multigrade teaching?
2. What kind of professional development do you offer to teachers as regards multigrade teaching in terms of:
  - a. Planning?
  - b. Classroom organisation?
  - c. Instructional strategies?
  - d. Classroom management?
  - e. Teaching and learning resources?
  - f. Others
3. What do multigrade teachers say are the challenges in multigrade classes?



	<p>is more convenient if portable boards can be supplied</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some classes are small such that a group means the whole class</li> </ul>	
CM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class management is more difficult when classes are separated</li> <li>• Learners underrate class leaders at times</li> <li>• It is difficult to manage large classes</li> </ul>	Classroom management
Div.Tm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching two classes within one period is challenging</li> <li>• One class is left unattended to for the whole period</li> </ul>	Time management
Part.App	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group work is not effective</li> <li>• Provision of self regulated learning activities is rare</li> <li>• Learner centred approaches are a challenge because the mental capability of learners is low</li> </ul>	Teaching strategies
Tbs Pbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text books are not enough</li> <li>• Learners need supplementary readers</li> <li>• Portable boards are scarce</li> </ul>	Teaching learning and assessment resources
Alt.to.MT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School committee is employing supporting teachers</li> <li>• Teachers employ supporting teachers taking responsibility of government to pay them as a way of shunning multigrade teaching</li> </ul>	Multigrade teachers paying salaries



Perf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learners from multigrade teaching are rarely selected to boarding secondary school</li></ul>	Poor education quality
------	--	------------------------

## APPENDIX 4: Classroom observation checklist

<p><b>PLANNING</b></p> <p>Preparation of schemes and records of work e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Prepared separately</li><li>– Using thematic approach.</li></ul> <p>Lesson plan indicating activities for each grade</p> <p>Availability of self-regulated learning activities</p> <p>Enough learning activities for the two grades</p> <p>Adaptation of curricular to suit different types of learners</p>
<p><b>CLASSROOM ORGANISATION</b></p> <p>Grades integrated or separated</p> <p>Arrangement of groups e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– According to grades.</li><li>– According to ability levels</li></ul> <p>Position of the teacher in class e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Positioned in front</li><li>– Positioned at the centre</li></ul> <p>Others</p>
<p><b>CLASS MANAGEMENT</b></p> <p>Management of time</p> <p>Organisation of Space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– e.g. use of labels</li></ul> <p>Monitoring of inattentive learners.</p> <p>Consistent classroom rules</p> <p>Management techniques</p> <p>Others</p>
<p><b>INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES</b></p> <p>Collaborative learning</p> <p>Cooperative learning</p> <p>Peer tutoring</p> <p>Self-regulated learning</p> <p>Independent learning</p> <p>Others</p>
<p><b>TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES</b></p> <p>Availability of resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– relevant to grade levels</li></ul> <p>Display of used resources for each grade.</p> <p>Library for self-regulated learning</p>

## APPENDIX 5: Observations and their interpretations.

<b>Observations following the checklist</b>	<b>Researcher's interpretations</b>
Teachers were found planning schemes and lesson plans separately for two classes	It could imply teachers lacked skills on the thematic approach for planning multigrade classes.
Teachers organised classes either by combing two grades or teaching two grades in separate classes	It could mean teachers have some knowledge on organising multigrade classes
Teachers who combined classes managed them very well.	It could mean that class management is not really a challenge in multigrade classes if classes are small.
Teachers spent the whole period teaching while the other class was waiting	It could mean teachers have problems in managing time
Teachers mostly used teacher centred methods of teaching, they rarely used participatory learning.	It could mean learners were not actively involved in constructing knowledge. They learnt individually.
Teaching and learning resources were not adequate	It could mean teachers are finding it difficult to teach multigrade classes.

**APPENDIX 6: Consent forms for participants**

**Dear participants**

I am Martha J. Chizumila, a student at Mzuzu University. I am currently studying for Master of education (Teacher Education) course.

My Research study is an investigation of challenges faced by teachers in rural schools when teaching multi-grade classes in Lughesho zone in Chitipa district. Results of the study will be an eye opener to all education officials and partners in Malawi on how education quality can be improved in the course of addressing challenges which will be unveiled in the study. In doing so, the study will attempt to suggest strategies which can lead to achieving the goal of education for all, which is believed to be failing in rural schools.

The participants` pride will be in contributing new knowledge in areas which affect teachers and learners in rural schools. I request for your participation in this important study by responding to questions during interviews and allowing me to observe lessons in multi-grade classes.

To ensure confidentiality and other ethical issues, your name will not be attached to any piece of information collected during the study. Information given will be completely confidential and private.

.....

**Name of participant**

**Signature**

**Date**

APPENDIX 7(a)



*TEACHER A WITH STANDARD 3 & 4 LEANERS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM*

Picture 1



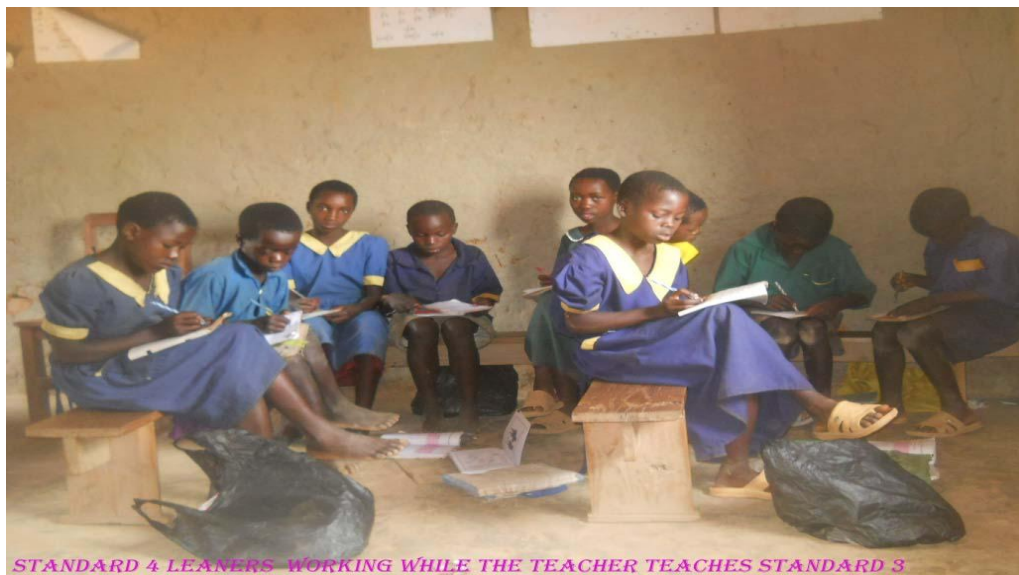
*STANDARD 5 LEANERS WITH A TEACHER*

Picture 2

APPENDIX 7 (b)

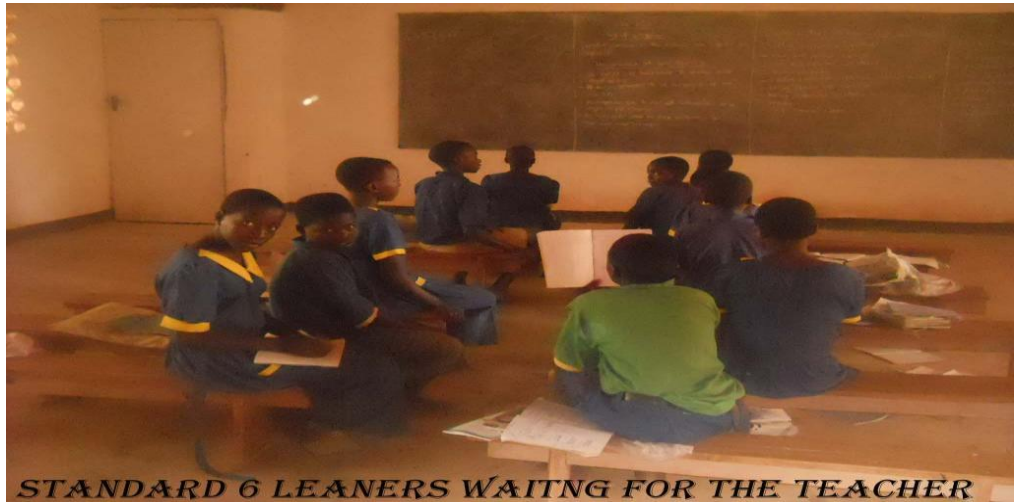


Picture 3



Picture 4

**APPENDIX 7(c)**



Picture 5



Picture 6

**APPENDIX 7(d)**



Picture 7



**APPENDIX 7(e)**



Picture 8

**APPENDIX 8: Enrolment for Ngali, Sofwe and Ibabala primary schools**

STD	NGALI		IBABALA		SOFWE	
	B	G	B	G	B	G
STD1	8	8	33	27	22	35
STD2	8	1	15	15	18	20
STD3	6	4	22	20	10	17
STD4	3	2	13	23	16	13
STD5	4	5	19	25	11	10
STD6	5	5	24	15	12	16
STD7	4	2	16	15	7	8
STD8	3	1	24	17	11	17
TOTAL	43	27	166	157	107	128
GRAND TOTAL	70		327		237	

**APPENDIX 9: Consent form to allow use of photos for dissemination of information**

I write to seek your approval to use photos of teachers, learners and classroom blocks taken from your school during data collection period.

This pictorial data will really substantiate the existence of multigrade teaching as well as exposing some of the challenges teachers are facing in Lughesho zone.

Thanks in advance for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Martha J. Chizumila (Researcher).

Approved:

**School committee chairperson**

Name.....Sign.....Date.....

..

**Head teacher**

Name.....Sign.....Date.....

.

## APPENDIX 10: Letter of permission



**MZUZU UNIVERSITY**

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TEACHING  
STUDIES

Mzuzu University  
Private Bag 201  
Luwi ng a  
Mzuzu 2  
M A L A W I

October 25, 2013

---

**The Divisional Educational Manager,**  
Northern Education Division  
P. O. Box  
**Mzuzu**

Dear Sir,

**PERMISSION TO USE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN CHITIPA EDUCATION DISTRICT FOR RESEARCH:**

Mrs. Martha Nyondo (Nee Ms. Chizumila) of Karonga Teachers College is a graduate Student of Mzuzu University studying for a Master of Education (MEd.) degree in Teacher Education. Mrs. Nyondo has completed the first phase of her programme and is now in the second phase where she is expected to conduct a research in preparation for her thesis writing.

Mrs. Nyondo would like to involve some primary schools in Chitipa Education District in Misuku, Lughesho Zone, to collect her research data. The schools are as follows: Ibabala, Ngali and Sofwe Primary Schools.

I am therefore writing to seek your permission for Mrs. Nyondo to use the mentioned primary schools in your Educational Division for her research.

Sir, I would appreciate very much if Mrs. Nyondo would be granted the permission.

Yours Sincerely,



**Sam D. Dumba Safuli (PhD)**  
**COORDINATOR MED. PROGRAMME**

Cc: District Education Manager – Chitipa  
Primary Education Advisor (PEA), Misuku, Lughesho Education Zone,  
Head Teacher, Ibabala Primary School,  
Head Teacher, Ngali Primary School,  
Head Teacher ,Sofwe Primary School,