

**CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS OF MULTI-GRADE CLASSES IN
PRIMARY SCHOOLS AT NZHELELE EAST CIRCUIT**

by

MUOFHE SANDRA MULAUDZI

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for the degree of**

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EDITOR DECLARATION

I, Dr Bevelyn Dube, of the Communication and Applied Language Studies Department at the University of Venda declare that I proofread and edited the Master of Education dissertation "*Challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in primary schools at Nzhelele East Circuit*" written by Muofhe Sandra Mulaudzi (student number 30676991).

 13/06/2016

Dr BEVELYN DUBE: BA, Grad CE, BA Hons (English), MA (English) University of Zimbabwe, DPhil (SU)
University of Venda
Department of Communication and Applied Language Studies
P.B. X5050
Thohoyandou
O950
RSA
Phone: (B) +27 (0) 15 962 8420
Mobile: + 27 (0) 847565524
Email: Bevelyn.dube@univen.ac.za or bevndu@yahoo.com

DECLARATION

I, **MUOFHE SANDRA MULAUDZI**, declare that:

Challenges Experienced by Teachers of Multi-grade Classes in Primary Schools at Nzhelele East Circuit

...submitted for the Master of Education in Curriculum Studies degree at the University of South Africa is my own work and that it has not been previously submitted for a degree or examination purpose at this or any other university, and that all the sources I have used are acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....
MUOFHE SANDRA MULAUDZI

.....
DATE

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine the challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes. Multi-grade teaching has become one of the priority topics in the Teaching profession agenda. The reason for bringing this issue onboard is the recognition that multi-grade teaching has a potential to improve quality of teaching. This study therefore seeks to identify the challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes. A qualitative research was conducted in Nzhelele East Circuit. Six schools with multi-grade classes were purposively sampled. Data were collected through individual interviews with five teachers of multi-grade classes and six principals of the sampled schools and focus group interviews were conducted with three groups constituted of 3 teachers each from the 3 identified schools. Data were also collected through lesson observations. Data were categorised according to themes and then analysed inductively. The study revealed that multi-grade teachers experience a number of challenges. The study thus, recommends that the Department of Education should strengthen continued professional teacher development (CPTD) in teaching in multi-grade context. CPTD should also be extended to professionals like curriculum advisors to re-skill them on their advisory roles. The Department of Education should also ensure that the number of grades in multi-grade classes should not exceed two.

Key Concepts: Multi-grade teaching, mono-grade teaching, curriculum and experience.

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of democracy in South Africa in 1994, there have been many transformational changes in the educational system, such as curriculum policy, admission policy and resourcing. These changes focused mainly on redressing the inequalities of the past in schools, meaning that curriculum policy and admission policy had to be the same in all public schools, and educational resources had to be distributed equitably in all schools according to the needs of learners.

Chudnovsky (1998:1) states that during the apartheid era, the allocation of resources to white schools greatly exceeded those that were made available to black schools. As a result, learner-educator ratios in white schools were often as low as 1:16 while in many black schools they reached 1:60 or more. The post-apartheid education system, in its attempt to redress the historic inequality in learner-educator ratios, embarked on the process of *rationalization* and *redeployment*, commonly known as “R and R”, of teachers based on the needs of learners. The idea was to appoint teachers to achieve a balanced learner-educator ratio ranging from 1:35 to 1:40 across the country (Chudnovsky, 1998:1). This means that the staff establishment, especially that of teachers, would be determined by the department. The staff establishment indicates the number of teachers a school qualifies for in terms of the number of pupils it has enrolled. Schools whose numbers of teachers exceed the norm, have to be declared that they are in excess. All the teachers who are in excess are then redeployed to schools that are understaffed. This causes a lot of movement of teachers from one school to another.

This process of redeployment has a negative effect on rural schools. With the advent of dwindling learner numbers at rural schools, a number of schools is left with more grades and less teachers. In these instances, schools tend to opt for the introduction of multi-grade teaching. Multi-grade teaching is a fact of life in rural public schools and government aided farm schools

in South Africa (DoE, 2005:46). Tambukani (2004:18) maintains that multi-grade teaching is *a massive and complex phenomenon* worldwide that deserves scholarly attention as an object of scientific study.

Teaching in multi-grade classes has become a challenge that teachers have to contend with. The report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education highlighted multi-grade as a specific challenge in rural schools, requiring special skills and more training on the part of the educator (DoE, 2005:46).

It is against this background that I find it necessary to conduct research on *Challenges Experienced by Teachers of Multi-grade Classes in Primary Schools at Nzhelele East Circuit*.

1.2 THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is general agreement in the literature that multi-grade teaching is prevalent globally and places greater demands on teachers than single grade teaching (Brown, 2008:19). Brown (2008) further argues that teachers of multi-grade classes generally have a negative perception of multi-grade classes and multi-grade teaching due to the diverse challenges that they face. The report of the Task Team for the Review of the Implementation of the National Curriculum Statement (DoE, 2009:60) states that no specific training has been provided for teachers of multi-grade classes and that there is a lack of policy guidance for these teachers.

In 2006, the school in which I was employed was affected by the rightsizing process, which required the *rationalization* and *redeployment* processes to take place. Two teachers were declared in excess and deployed to other schools. The school was left with five teachers responsible for eight grades. Some grades were, therefore, combined to ensure that teaching and learning takes place in all grades. Teaching in these classes became a challenge which the remaining teachers in the school had to contend with. For instance, teachers had to teach two different grades in one class at the same time and they were responsible for more than four learning areas across the grades.

It is against this background that I consider it necessary to conduct an investigation on the challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in the primary schools at Nzhelele East Circuit.

1.3 THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study intended to conduct an investigation on the challenges experienced by multi-grade teachers when implementing the curriculum. In order to achieve this aim, I developed the following objectives:

- To identify challenges experienced by multi-grade teachers in the implementation of the curriculum;
- To explore how multi-grade teachers manage the implementation of the curriculum; and
- To make recommendations on the strategies that could make teaching and learning successful within the context of multi-grade teaching.

1.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:

The main research question is:

- What are the challenges experienced by multi-grade teachers in implementing the curriculum?

The following sub-questions were used to address the main research question:

- How do multi-grade teachers manage the implementation of the curriculum in their classrooms?
- What strategies can be used to make teaching and learning successful within the context of multi-grade teaching?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- The study will add to the number of studies already conducted in the past about multi-grade teaching. The study will enable curriculum planners to identify problems with regard to multi-grade teaching and to seek possible solutions to such problems.
- If problems in multi-grade teaching are identified and addressed, teaching and learning in multi-grade classes would improve.
- Furthermore, the study would generate awareness and interest among other researchers. It will open up areas for further studies.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Research Method

The study adopted the qualitative research approach. The qualitative research method, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:315), is an inquiry in which researchers collect data in face to face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings (e.g. schools). The qualitative research method describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions.

1.6.2 Research Design

A research design describes how the study was conducted. It summarises the procedures for conducting the study, including when, from whom, and under what conditions the data were obtained (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:22). The study adopted a narrative inquiry. A narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research in which the researcher attempts to explore the lived experiences of people by probing them to answer the research question (Bleakley, 2005:534). The rationale for using the narrative inquiry was to enable participants to give narrative responses to the research questions which guided this study.

1.6.3 Population

A population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalise the results of the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:119). According to Gay (1992:124), the population is a group of interest to the researcher, the group to which she or he would like the results of the study to be generalisable.

For the purpose of this study, the population comprised of all teachers who teach within the context of multi-grade classes in the Nzhelele East Circuit.

1.6.4 Sample and Sampling Procedures

A sample is a group of subjects or participants from whom data are collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:119). The sample of the study consisted of 14 teachers of multi-grade classes and 6 school principals from 6 sampled primary schools in Nzhelele East Circuit, who had firsthand experience of teaching within the multi-grade contexts.

Sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals represent the larger group from which they are selected (Gay, 1992:140). According to Gay (1992:140), the purpose of sampling is to use a sample to gain information about a population.

The selection of participants was done by means of purposeful sampling, in order to obtain rich information from the participants. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:319), purposeful sampling involves selecting information-rich cases for an in-depth study when one wants to understand something about those cases without needing or desiring to generalise to all such cases. Purposeful sampling is done to increase the utility of information obtained from a small sample. It requires that information be obtained about variations among the sub-units before the sample is chosen. In this study, I purposefully sampled teachers who teach in multi-grade classes and principals of schools that have multi-grade classes.

1.6.5 Data Collection Technique

Research involves gathering information about the variables in the study. To collect data from the subjects the researcher chooses from a wide range of techniques and approaches. Each method has advantages and disadvantages, and the specific approach adopted should be the best one for answering the research question (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:130).

The methods of data collection that I used comprised focus group interviews, individual interviews and observations. According to Creswell (2009:179), an interview allows researcher control over the line of questioning. McMillan and Schumacher (2006:360) state that focus group interview is used to obtain better understanding of a problem, concern or idea, and that by creating a social environment in which group members are stimulated by one another's perceptions and ideas, the researcher can increase the quality and richness of data through a more efficient strategy than by using a one on one interview. Creswell (2009:179) also indicates that, through observation, the researcher has first-hand experience with participants and that unusual aspects can be noticed during observation. Because the primary data of a qualitative interview are verbatim accounts of what transpires in the interview session (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:355), a tape recorder was used to ensure completeness of the verbal interaction and to provide material for reliability checks.

1.6.6 Data Collection Procedure

I sought permission to collect data from the sampled schools. I wrote a letter to the District Senior Manager requesting permission to conduct research (Appendix A). Permission to conduct research was also requested from the Circuit Manager (Appendix C) and principals of the sampled schools (Appendix E). Letters of informed consent were also sent to all participants and a protocol of informed consent was signed.

After permission was granted, I communicated telephonically with principals of each school to arrange suitable dates for data collection. Participants were interviewed at their respective

schools. All interview sessions were tape recorded. Lesson observations were done at six multi-grade classes.

1.6.7 Data Analysis

Qualitative data are analysed primarily using an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns among the categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:364). According to Creswell (2009:183), the process of data analysis involves preparing data for analysis, conducting different analysis, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data.

In this study, data obtained from focus group and one-on-one interviews were transcribed and coded and responses grouped according to the questions asked. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The coded data were used to generate themes for analysis. The themes were then used to create sub-themes to obtain comprehensive meaning of data. Data obtained from lesson observation were also grouped according to the predetermined categories used in the lesson observation sheet.

1.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Trustworthiness, also called validity in qualitative designs, is the degree to which the interpretations have mutual meaning between the participants and the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:324). According to Creswell (2009:191), validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research, and it seeks to determine whether the findings from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, or the readers of an account are accurate.

To ensure the validity of the research results, I used multi-method strategies to collect data. I used focus group and one-on-one interviews, as well as observations. Observation analysis was triangulated with focus group and one-on-one interviews. Triangulation is the cross-validation among data sources, data collection strategies, time periods, and theoretical schemes. To find regularities in the data, the researcher compares different sources, situations, and methods to see

whether the same pattern keeps recurring. I used a tape recorder to record all interviews conducted in this study. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:326), mechanically recorded data provide accurate and relatively complete records.

Interviews were phrased in the participants' language, which enabled me to obtain the literal meaning of the statements. Direct quotations from the data were used to illustrate participants' meanings and, thus, ensure validity.

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

McMillan and Schumacher (2006:142) argues that ethics generally deal with beliefs about what is right or wrong, proper or improper, good or bad. They further argue that the primary investigator of the study is responsible for the ethical standards to which the study adheres.

In this study, I gave participants assurances of confidentiality and anonymity and informed them about the intended use of the data. I explained to the participants that the information they provided would be treated with confidentiality and that neither the names of the participants nor their schools would be mentioned in the study. Pseudonyms were used to refer to participants and the schools were coded A to F. Participants were also informed of their choice about whether to participate or not and that they could withdraw their participation at any time without penalty. I also asked participants to sign consent forms before participating in the research. Participants were also requested to sign a consent form to agree to participate in the interview, to give me permission to use of a tape recorder during the interview and also to permit me to observe their lessons.

I sought for research ethics clearance from the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee of Unisa. I sought permission from the Department of Basic Education, Vhembe District, to carry out the research within the circuit under its supervision. I also sought permission from the Nzhelele East Circuit Manager, Principals of the sampled schools and the participants.

1.9 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out within the Nzhelele East Circuit of the Vhembe District in the Limpopo Province. Nzhelele East Circuit has 36 primary schools of which six of which teach in the context of multi-grade classes. The study focused on the six schools with multi-grade classes.

1.10 DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this section I define the key concepts for the purpose of common understanding.

1.10.1 Multi-grade Teaching

Multi-grade teaching is not universal, but the practice is widespread. Multi-grade or multilevel teaching refers to the teaching of children of different grade levels at the same time in the same setting (Joubert, 2010:58). Brown (2008:6) defines multi-grade teaching as the teaching of learners of different ages, grades and abilities in the same group.

In the context of this study, multi-grade teaching refers to the teaching of learners of different grades in one classroom at the same time, with one teacher responsible for all grades.

1.10.2 Mono-grade Teaching

Mono-grade teaching is the teaching of one grade learners by a single teacher at any one time. Each grade comprises one or more classes of learners, depending on the number of learners. In some primary school systems, the same teacher teaches all subjects to his/her class throughout the school year. In others, different teachers teach different subjects. In some systems, the same teacher moves with his/her class group from one grade to the next. In others, the teacher is identified with a particular grade (Little, 2004:1).

In this study, mono-grade teaching refers to the teaching of single grade learners by one or different subject teachers.

1.10.3 Curriculum

Curriculum refers to a formal academic programme provided by a school, as reflected on the timetable. It also refers to a particular course of instruction or a syllabus. The Committee of Heads of Departments (1991) defined a curriculum as the collection of subjects/instructional offerings, their structuring and related requirements, with which provision is made for the pursuit of an aim with a particular target group (Hoadley & Jansen, 2009: 247). In this study, curriculum refers to the syllabus as prescribed by the South African Department of Education, together with skills and values that should be acquired by learners.

1.10.4 Experience

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines experience as having a particular situation affect you or happens to you. However, in this study experience refers to what teachers encounter while teaching in multi-grade classes.

1.11 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study is divided into five chapters.

Chapter One: This chapter forms the basis of the overall research study. It contains the background of the study, the problem statement, the aim of the study, a description of the methods of the study and definition of concepts.

Chapter Two: Contains a review of literature on challenges experienced by multi-grade teachers in implementing the curriculum and the possible strategies that can be used to help them to improve the quality of teaching and learning in multi-grade classes.

Chapter Three: Provides details of the methodology adopted in the study and the reasons for selecting that particular design.

Chapter Four: This chapter provides the analysis, the results and interpretation of the data, as well as an account of the findings.

Chapter Five: In this chapter I present a summary of the study, which comprises a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Multi-grade teaching has become one of the priority topics of the Working Groups on the Teaching Profession (WGTP) agenda. The reason for bringing this issue on board is the recognition that multi-grade teaching has a potential to improve the quality of teaching, thus contributing to the global effort of achieving Education for All (EFA) goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) education related goals (Juvane, 2005:3).

McEwan (2008:465) states that the MDGs specify that by 2015 children in every country should be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. The EFA initiative promulgates a similarly ambitious goal, with an emphasis on children in difficult circumstances, ethnic minorities and girls (McEwan, 2008:465).

According to Brown (2010:193), in South Africa, the need for multi-grade teaching remains essential, especially now that it is a signatory to various international conventions and the United Nations agreement that emphasises basic education for all. But case studies of multi-grade teaching in South Africa point to numerous challenges in the process.

In this chapter, I present the literary debate to gain insight into scholarly views about experiences of teachers of multi-grade classes and the challenges they encounter in their day to day encounter with learners, colleagues, school managers, parents and communities. In order to achieve this purpose, I have divided the review of literature into the following sub-headings: What is multi-grade teaching? motivations for multi-grade teaching; the practice of multi-grade teaching; multi-grade reforms; challenges of multi-grade teaching; teaching strategies for successful multi-grade teaching; and minimum conditions for ensuring that multi-grade teaching is beneficial to learners.

2.2 WHAT IS MULTI-GRADE TEACHING?

Little (cited in Brown, 2008:6), delineated what the term ‘multi-grade teaching’ means. She refers to multi-grade teaching as the teaching of learners of different ages, grades, and abilities in the same group. She distinguishes it from mono-grade teaching in which students within the same grade are assumed to be similar in terms of age and ability. She also distinguishes multi-grade teaching from multi-age within grade teaching, which occurs when there are wide variations in age within the same grade.

Joubert (2010:1) refers to multi-grade teaching or multi-level teaching as the teaching of different grade levels at the same time in the same setting, and that many terms are found in the literature to describe multi-grade teaching. He indicates that the terms ‘combination classes’, ‘forced mixed-age classes’ and ‘forced mixed grade’ usually refer to settings arising through necessity and the characteristics of enrolment.

According to Hargreaves, Montero, Chau, Sibli and Thanh (2001:1), multi-grade classes are classes where one teacher has the sole responsibility for two or more grades or classes of learners at the same time. These authors, further state that the term is broadly used to include combination classes, multi-age classes, vertically grouped classes and family grouped classes. Brunswic and Valerien (cited in Brown, 2008:6), state that multi-grade teaching is a situation where a single teacher is responsible for pupils of various ages spread over several grades, and who study different curricula .

Brown (2008:6) argues that multi-grade teaching does not appear to enjoy a common interpretation among researchers and education practitioners. He indicates that for many, the concept remains deeply contested, and this has made it difficult to build consensus about what it means.

In this research the meaning which I find to be more representative is that of Brunswic and Valerien (2004) who state that multi-grade teaching is a teaching where a single teacher is responsible for learners of various ages spread over several grades, and who study different

curricula. This definition is appropriate for this research because multi-grade classes in the sampled schools comprise learners of different ages and grades, with different curricula, combined and taught together by a single teacher.

2.3 MOTIVATIONS FOR MULTI-GRADE TEACHING

Little (2001:2) states that multi-grade teaching arises through necessity or pedagogic choice and that the description of multi-grade teaching settings in literature often fails to indicate whether they have arisen through necessity or choice.

Little (2004:4) outline the conditions under which multi-grade teaching arises as follows:

- (i) Schools in areas of low population density are usually widely scattered and inaccessible and enrolments low. Such schools may have only one or two teachers responsible for all grades;
- (ii) Schools that comprise of a cluster of classrooms spread across in different locations, in which some classes are multi-grade for the same reasons as in above and some are mono-grade. Some teachers within the same 'schools' spend most of their time with multi-grade classes, some with mono-grade classes;
- (iii) Schools in areas where learners and teacher numbers are declining, and where previously there was no mono-grade teaching;
- (iv) Schools in areas of population growth and school expansion, where enrolments in the expanding upper grades remain small and teacher numbers few;
- (v) Schools in areas where parents send their children to more popular schools within reasonable travelling distance, leading to a decline in the potential population of learners and teachers in the less popular school;
- (vi) Schools in which the number of learners admitted to a class exceeds official norms on size, necessitating the combination of some learners from one class grade with learners from another grade;
- (vii) Mobile schools in which one teacher moves with nomadic and pastoralist learners spanning a wide range of ages and grades;

- (viii) Schools in which teacher absenteeism is high and supplementary teacher arrangements are non-effectual or non-existent;
- (ix) Schools in which the official number of teachers deployed is sufficient to support mono-grade teaching but the actual number deployed is less (for a variety of reasons); and
- (x) Schools in which learners are organised in multi-grade rather than mono-grade groups, and for pedagogic reasons, often as part of a more general curriculum and pedagogic reform of educational systems.

Little points out that condition (x) above underlines a distinction between multi-grade teaching that arises through *necessity* and *choice*. Condition (i – ix) above arise through necessity. The necessity, which is commonly a motivation in developing countries, arises from the characteristics of learners (i – vii) or teachers (viii – ix). Condition (x), mostly associated with multi-grade in developed countries, is of a different nature altogether and reflects a choice made by policymakers and/or teachers about how to change and improve the quality of pedagogy.

Brunswic and Valerien (cited in Brown, 2008:8)), theorised that when multi-grade teaching is undertaken, it is often established as a result of necessity: often based on political or educational rationalization. They argue that when multi-grade teaching is established for reasons of necessity, the evidence suggests that it is motivated by geographical or demographic constraints (scattered settlements, low population density, declining population density resulting from rural-urban migration, schools that have a number of remote sites), or administrative or pedagogical problems (absenteeism, leave or lack of teachers, insufficient numbers of students at higher grades, competition between schools that are seen by parents as being of unequal quality).

Brunswic and Valerien (cited in Brown, 2008:8) further argue that, when multi-grade teaching is established for political reasons, it is motivated by regional development and efforts to stop the migration to the cities, that is, the desire to maintain a school site in a given locality. They further argue that when the choice is made for educational reasons, it is made by innovative teachers, regardless of the status or type of the school (Brown, 2008:8).

Little (2004) and Brunswick and Valerien (2004), concur on the conditions under which multi-grade teaching arises. These conditions are necessity and choice. From the views presented by these authors, one can easily conclude that most reasons for multi-grade teaching are those of necessity rather than choice.

2.4 THE PRACTICE OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING

In this subsection, focus is on multi-grade teaching in developed and developing countries.

2.4.1 Multi-grade Teaching in Developed Countries

In developed countries, multi-grade teaching is linked to the multi-age perspective. Proponents of mixed age grouping argue that there are sound pedagogical reasons for placing learners of different ages together in the same class. Mixed age classes, it is argued, stimulate children's social development and encourage greater classroom cooperation (Berry, 2010:1). Veenman (cited in Little, 2001:483), argues that multi-age classes deliberately mix ages and grade levels and students stay with the same teacher for a number of years, usually three. Multi-age classes are formed out of choice based on perceived educational benefits.

Multi-grade classes and schools in the rural areas of industrialised countries arise largely through necessity rather than choice. Accounts of and research on multi-grade teaching in rural areas are available for several industrialised countries. These include Australia (Young, 1996), Canada (Mulcahy, 1993 and Daniel, 1988), England (Galton & Patrick, 1990), Finland (Laukkanen & Selventoinen, 1978), New Zealand (Draisey & Ewing, 1970), USA (Miller, 1989, 1991 and Prat, 1986) (Little, 2001:489).

According to Little (2001:483), in developed countries such as USA, Canada, England, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden, where studies of mono-grade and multi-grade teaching have been carried out, the majority of learners enter school at an official school entry age and move through grades without repetition. Hence the 'age' and 'grade' identities of students converge to a common entity. Furthermore, Little (2001) singled out Finland as a country in which

innovations in the teaching and curriculum strategies developed in multi-grade schools making it a fertile ground for the development of ideas applicable in mono-grade schools.

Birch and Lally (cited in Little, 2001:485) are of the view that in Victoria, one of Australia's most populous states, policy makers decided that schools would employ multi-grade teaching during the first three years of primary schooling, in the belief that it is the best form of education for children.

Little (2001:490) further argues that, although the vast majority of multi-grade classes in the education system of developed countries are located in rural settings, it does not mean that children, their teachers, their parents and their schools and communities are disadvantaged socially, educationally and economically. Rural schools in industrialised countries generally have adequate resources.

2.4.2 Multi-grade Teaching in Developing Countries

In many developing countries, the term multi-grade nearly always refers to classes where grades have been combined for reasons of necessity rather than pedagogical choice. In the developing world context, the emphasis on the word 'multi-grade' is on the word *grade*, in that children are often grouped according to the grade they have reached in terms of curriculum and syllabus coverage (Hargreaves, Montero, Chau, Sibli & Thanh, 2001:499).

Hargreaves *et al.* (2001:499) reviewed multi-grade teaching in three developing countries, namely Peru, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. They describe the context of multi-grade teaching in each of these countries. In Peru, multi-grade schools offer basic primary education and are the most common form of site for children who are dispersed throughout the country side, or for settlements with few children of school age. It is by means of multi-grade schools that the state is able to offer educational opportunities for the most isolated, poor and predominantly indigenous populations. Consequently, multi-grade teaching is closely associated with an impoverished and poor educational service, with deficient resources as well as lack of capacity to promote learning. Peru has about 21,500 primary multi-grade schools, 96% of which are located in rural areas.

Since 89% of rural schools are multi-grade, it is not surprising that the terms ‘multi-grade’ and ‘rural’ are be used synonymously in the case of Peruvian primary education.

In Sri Lanka, multi-grade schools tend to serve rural and plantation schools where children from poor socio-economic backgrounds form the clientele. The existence of multi-grade schools is explained as follows:

- Decentralisation of education has resulted in a network of schools which reaches out to the remotest areas of the country. However, due to low density of access and socio-economic parameters, which characterised under privileged groups, schools in some locations tend to be small with low enrolments. In these schools, a single teacher has to manage a number of classes which are often in the primary cycle, but sometimes the classes extend beyond primary (MEHE, 1986: Extract from *Developing Multi-grade and Multilevel Teaching*, Abhayadeva, 1989:1).

In Vietnam, multi-grade education is one successful way of providing primary education to those children who are disadvantaged by living in remote and difficult geographical areas. It is also economical in terms of teachers, thus, suiting the situation in Vietnam where there is a shortage of teachers. There are four types of schools in Vietnam, namely day schools, satellite schools, boarding schools and semi-boarding schools. Satellite schools are multi-grade schools which serve pupils from several villages where pupil numbers are too low to warrant one school per village and too low to warrant one teacher per grade.

According to Juvane (2005:4), the practice of one teacher having to teach several grade levels at the same time is quite common in low population settlements such as remote areas and small villages in Africa. Multi-grade teaching in Africa was adapted as a necessity rather than by design to:

- Address teacher shortages especially in rural, hard to reach areas with small school enrolments;
- Ensure a cost effective measure to expand access to basic education.

- Assist countries to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) goals.

Juvane (2005) argues that, in Africa, as a consequence of a shortage of teachers, teacher absenteeism owing to HIV/AIDS related causes and budget restraints facing many countries, multi-grade classes are the only foreseeable options and that Ministries of Education see multi-grade teaching approaches as a key pedagogic tool that can assist teachers to cope in these difficult situations (Jordaan & Joubert, 2008:5).

It is estimated that 50% of the schools in Africa include multi-grade classes, suggesting that multi-grade teaching, though not always recognised and legalised, is more highly developed and more widely found than is generally thought (Jordaan & Joubert, 2008:4). According to the Ethiopia Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) 2005/06-2009/10, one area of implementing the alternative basic education mode of instruction is the use of multi-grade classrooms. Hence the plan stipulates that:

- (i) The introduction of multi-grade schools shall be 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.
- (ii) Appropriate training courses and material development shall also be made available for teachers who will become multi-grade teachers.
- (iii) Teachers shall also be trained in pedagogy and management of multi-grade teaching.
- (iv) Textbooks shall be modified in such a way that a great deal of self-learning approaches and exercises are incorporated to meet the demands of multi-grade class students. (Juvane, 2005:5).

Juvane (2005:5) further points out that the history of multi-grade teaching in Zambia gives similar reasons. Tambukani (cited by Juvane, 2005:5) notes that multi-grade teaching was introduced in schools which were mostly in rural and sparsely populated areas and had a difficult terrain. The main reasons cited for the introduction of multi-grade teaching include:

- (i) Increased access to education provision for disadvantaged areas;

- (ii) Increased access to learning for understaffed schools;
- (iii) Maximise use of available teachers and classroom space; and
- (iv) Cost effective use of available resources.

2.4.3 Multi-grade Teaching in South Africa

The Research Report on Teaching Literacy and Numeracy in Multi-grade Classes in Rural and Farm Schools in South Africa (EPC, 2011:17) states that multi-grade teaching takes place in about 27% of all schools in the country, with about 47044 learners enrolled. The largest number of multi-grade schools is located in Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal provinces. These provinces are rural in nature, with extreme pockets of poverty, and agricultural activity representing a significant proportion of income.

The report also indicates that there are significant numbers of multi-grade schools in highly urbanised provinces, for example, in Gauteng, where 38% of the schools are multi-grade, compared to the national average of 27%. The high average could be explained by the fact that Gauteng has a fairly substantial agricultural base and small farming in peri-urban areas. It is likely that these schools are in these areas, as well as informal settlements.

In South Africa, like other African countries, the motivation for multi-grade teaching is that of necessity rather than choice. In South Africa, multi-grade teaching is reported in two categories of primary schools, those classified as farm schools by virtue of their ownership and location on private commercial farm properties, and those classified as government owned public primary schools or non-farm schools. Multi-grade teaching in these primary schools is not a result of choice, but largely of necessity, mainly linked to the shrinking learner population in the rural areas, and teacher shortages (Brown, 2010:193).

Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education (DoE, 2005) indicates that most small schools have multi-grade classes, which have become a feature of rural schools as they struggle with limited resources to increase the number of grades offered at the school. The report further indicates that post provisioning norms mean that teachers can teach more than two grades in very

small schools in fact, there are instances of teachers teaching up to seven grades in small farm schools.

From the above discussion, one can deduce that multi-grade teaching is practiced in both developed and developing countries, but under different conditions. In developed countries, it is mainly practiced out of choice. Although there are cases in rural areas, where it is practiced out of necessity, it is not associated with poverty and lack of resources. In developing countries, multi-grade teaching arises out of necessity and is closely related to poverty, lack of resources and ineffective teaching and learning.

2.5 MULTI-GRADE REFORMS

2.5.1 Multi-grade Reform in Colombia, Guatemala and Chile

According to Schiefel (1991), Colombia's Escuela Nueva is the pioneering reform of multi-grade teaching, and often cited as the best for rural schools (McEwan, 2008:468). This reform, according to Brown (2010:194), started in the early 1970s, with the piloting of methodologies and strategies for multi-grade teaching.

The Escuela Nueva Programme is usually run by one or two teachers per school, and classwork and assignments, which are normally assigned to individual learners in a traditional single-grade school, are combined with group work. Learners work at their own pace, which implies that, even if they drop-out of school for a time and later return to school, they can simply pick up where they left off (Brown, 2010:195).

Brown (2010:195) points out that the materials for multi-grade teaching, in the Escuela Nueva programme are developed as self-instructional learning guides for both teachers and learners. Other components of the Escuela Nueva include curricula-based learning corners, library, a suggestion box for learners, a systematically integrated curriculum, in-service training and follow-up for teachers, community and administrative strategies linking the school and the community. According to Brown (2010:195), teachers in in-service sessions, use detailed

manuals that are similar to the learning guides used by learners. The training sessions take place throughout the year. The keen focus is on the continuing development of teachers, as well as on the implementation of the programme and on ensuring that there are appropriate resources to support learning.

McEwan (2008:476) points out that several impact evaluations have been conducted on the Escuela Nueva multi-grade intervention, using multiple sources of data. Results from an evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Education in Colombia, on the achievement of Grade three and five students in Mathematics and Spanish, showed that the Grade three Escuela Nueva learners scored higher in Spanish and Mathematics, than learners in mono-grade classes. Grade five learners scored higher in Spanish, but there was little difference in Maths (Little, 2001:487).

Psacharopoulos et al. (cited in Berry, (2010:6) compared learners' achievement in Spanish language and Mathematics in the Escuela Nueva schools with student achievement in traditional schools. They found significant achievement advantages in Escuela Nueva schools for learners in both Grade Three and Five.

McEwan (cited in Little, 2001:488) replicated the school effects on achievement using a subsequent and more representative data set. Even though the Escuela Nueva Schools were particularly well endowed with textbooks and libraries, the school effects on achievement remained strong even after controlling for the effects of textbooks and library. He concluded that the Escuela Nueva Programme may be a good example of holistic, qualitative change, rather than the application of interchangeable and discrete physical inputs.

Brown (2010:195) concludes that results from different statistical analysis confirm the superior achievement of children of the Escuela Nueva, a significant reduction in drop-out and repetition rates, improvement in learners' self-esteem and civic behaviour. He further states that results from a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) test on the impact of the Escuela Nueva Programme showed that children's self esteem was higher than that of those learning in other settings.

In Guatemala, the Nueva Escuela Unitaria is a more recent innovation, borrowing ideas and personnel from the Colombian reform. In 1989, the Ministry of Education and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) started project BEST to improve the quality of primary schooling. As one component, it implemented a multi-grade school intervention in 1993. The pilot programme focused on 100 schools in several regions, expanding to another 100 in the next two years. In later years, the additional schools expansions received financial support from non-governmental organisations such as the Coffee Growers of Guatemala (McEwan, 2008:469).

Chile implemented its own rural school intervention, MECE-Rural, as part of a nationwide primary school reform in the 1990s that emphasised the reduction of inequality. Until 1992, multi-grade primary schools and students received no special attention from the Ministry of Education. Beginning in 1992, the Ministry provided training and materials to rural schools, reaching all multi-grade schools by 1996. By the end of the decade, MECE-Rural was fully incorporated into Ministry operations and was rechristened the Rural Basic Programme (McEwan, 2008:489).

McEwan (2008:470) describes the general features of the Colombian, Guatemalan and Chilean reform. According to McEwan, each reform has much in common, particularly the Colombian and Guatemalan version. McEwan describes the following:

- First, each intervention emphasised in-service training for current rural teachers, rather than pre-service education. Teachers learned instructional techniques suitable for a multi-grade setting, including individual and cooperative learning, as well as the use of newly-developed instructional materials.
- Second, each intervention promoted the development and distribution of multi-grade instructional materials, including teacher guides and student textbooks that facilitated self-guide learning. The texts proceed in units that students can pursue at their own pace and without continual supervision.
- Third, the training and materials emphasised the application of active pedagogies. Students participate in individual and small group exercises that require the acquisition and application of new skills, rather than passive attendance in a large-group lecture.

- Fourth, governments and committees involve students in the management and organisation of the school, particularly in the Colombian and Guatemalan versions.
- Fifth, the intervention in Colombia and Guatemala provides specific mechanisms for involving the community in the school, including the development of local agricultural calendars.
- Sixth, in place of a traditional ‘pass or fail’ assessment at the year-end student evaluation occurs throughout the year, emphasising mastery of each unit’s skill, Colombian and Guatemalan sources describe ‘flexible’ promotion as a key strength of the intervention, giving higher rates of grade repetition.

2.5.2 The Zambian Intervention Programme

Multi-grade teaching 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. It was argued that multi-grade teaching would enable small schools with low enrolments in each grade to upgrade themselves to grades seven level without putting up additional classrooms and teachers.

According to a Review of Research and Practice-Education (1994:1), in-service training courses in multi-grade teaching were developed by the Malcom Moffat Teachers’ Training College (MMTTC). Others “inputs” to the projects consisted of language and maths texts and exercise books, follow-up seminars, inspection, evaluation and incorporation of multi-grade teaching as part of the regular pre-service teacher training programme.

The review further indicates that approaches to curriculum and teaching appear to have promoted the MMTTC including the following:

- **The Common Timetable Option:** where all children learn the same subject in a given timetable period, but each grade group follows its own work, according to its own work programme and grade level.

- **The Subject Stagger Option:** subjects are staggered on the timetable so that grade groups learn different subjects in the same period. Subjects which require high teacher-pupil contact are matched with those requiring little.
- **The Subject Grouping Option:** subjects are presented to all grade groups together at the same time.

An evaluation by Lungwangwa (1989:13-14) indicates that, despite the problems encountered in the implementation of the training programmes, MMTTC staff believed that multi-grade teaching can have some positive outcomes. It can enhance independent learning, encourage teachers revision of materials covered in earlier grades, increases pupil interaction, and contributes to the country's universalising of basic education. Teachers in pilot schools were enthusiastic about multi-grade teaching. They perceived that it had learning benefits and were keen to receive further training (Review of Research and Practice- Education, 1994:2).

2.5.3 The South African Intervention Programme

In South Africa, the Western Cape is the only province to have implemented the multi-grade intervention programme. According to Jordaan and Joubert (2008:6), the Western Cape Education Department implemented the Multi-grade Rural Schools Intervention in 2002. Implementation took place by means of 10 cycles (9 month per cycle). More than 335 schools in Western Cape, 876 teachers and about 25 437 learners were in this intervention. Because of the distance and isolation, teacher clusters (networks) formed the core of this intervention.

Jordaan and Joubert (2008:6) further state that the intervention was implemented by linking teachers in person, as well as through electronic means (e-mail and the World Wide Web) with other teachers and groups to explore and discuss topics of interest, share information and strategies, and identify and address common problems. They indicate that the design of the intervention was strongly influenced by a set of publications from the international Multi-grade Education Conference held in Canada in 1992. Research at the North West Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) Oregon, and in Canada, as well as research funded by DFID at the University of London were equally influential. The IT component in the intervention also

benefited from experiences at the University of Twente, specifically the doctoral studies of Bert Moonen (Teacher Learning in In-service Networks on Internet, 2001). The particular approach to the concept of “number” followed by the Freudenthal Institute at the University of Utrecht was equally useful.

The intervention was built on four key pillars focussing on classroom management and instructional strategies, in-service training, ICT and the value of mental maths. It targeted six areas, which included the configuration of learning spaces and classroom organisation, classroom routines and discipline, curriculum structuring and planning, teaching strategies, self-directed strategies, and peer tutoring. It, furthermore, focussed on training teachers in these schools to use, develop and apply such learning programmes optimally (Jordaan and Joubert 2008:6).

Jordaan and Joubert (2008:6) further indicate that the sustainability of the project was rendered a fatal blow by the incompetence of newly appointed officials to manage funds in a sustainable fashion. As a result, the project leader left, which, in turn, left teachers without assistance and motivation. The intervention was terminated after three years by the Department of Education. No reason for the termination was given nor was any scientific research conducted on the implication of the termination thereof. Jordaan and Joubert (2008) also state that independent research proved that the Intervention resulted in a significant improvement in literacy and numeracy skills.

According to Jordaan and Joubert (2008:7), the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, in an effort to protect the ‘profit’ of the intervention, initiated and implemented a number of actions. One of these initiatives was the design and implementation of a University accredited (40 credits) course specifically aimed at rural multi-grade teachers. This course was run and about 900 teachers from rural multi-grade schools completed it. This was the first time that teachers were trained especially for multi-grade teaching and received accreditation in South Africa.

The demand for further study and skills improvement with specific regard to multi-grade education was so overwhelming that another course in advanced teaching was developed, and

has been running since 2004. More than 100 teachers have completed this course and the demand is ever increasing; more than 150 teachers are following this course (Jordaan and Joubert, 2008:8).

2.6 CHALLENGES OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING

Multi-grade teaching constitutes a work environment full of challenges and difficulties (McEwan, 2008:465-483). These challenges are discussed next.

2.6.1 Curriculum Organisation

Joubert (2010:58) states that the policy documents of South Africa's Department of Education make no mention of multi-grade schools. The curriculum is geared towards single-grade classrooms.

Brown (2010:194) argues that broadly in the multi-grade arrangement, although learners of different grades comprise one class, learners have to pursue grade-appropriate curricula. Lingam (cited by Brown, 2010:194) identifies this requirement as the greatest challenge of multi-grade teaching because it demands that the structure of the curricula, the learning resources and assessment strategies employed in the multi-grade teaching, and the learning process take on a new shape and form from that of the single-grade situation.

The Report of the Task Team for the Review of Implementation of the National Curriculum Statements (DoE, 2009:60) also highlighted that there is lack of policy guidance for multi-grade teachers. Issues such as managing different content at different levels are problematic for these teachers.

The results of the investigation by Taole and Mncube (2012:160) into the experiences of teachers in multi-grade teaching in rural schools showed that planning for instruction in multi-grade classes is a challenge for most teachers. Teachers indicated that they do not do separated planning for the grades that they are teaching. Instead, they do single planning for single grades.

According to Taole and Mncube (2012:160), this suggests that learners are treated the same even though they are of different grades. Ames-Ramello (cited in Brown, 2008:35) observed that using mono-grade curricula in multi-grade teaching was not only time-consuming, but it also resulted in effective instruction.

2.6.2 Professional and Social Isolation

Berry (2001:7) argues that professional and social isolation is one of the challenges facing teachers of multi-grade classes. He indicates that multi-grade teaching often takes place in remote schools in difficult to reach areas. Teachers not only face the difficulties of dealing with a multi-grade class, but also other constraints such as lack of resources, infrequent supervision, and poor living conditions.

2.6.3 Parents' Attitude towards Multi-grade Teaching

Parents' attitude towards multi-grade teaching is, according to Brown (2008:18), another challenge faced by multi-grade teachers. He argues that, despite the apparent utility value of parental support in the education process, it seems that multi-grade teaching and teachers do not always find it easy to gain parents' support. According to him, parents' concerns about multi-grade classes are commonly negative.

According to Jordaan and Joubert (2008:7) and Juana (2003), there seems to exist very little interest in multi-grade education on a global scale, and South Africa is no exception. Multi-grade schools are typically regarded as being second-rate schools; schools that parents would not like their children to go to.

2.6.4 Instructional Materials

Kyne (cited by Brown, 2008:35) points out that the instructional materials also tend to be written for the mono-grade classroom. Consequently, they are produced as grade-level textbooks and are

designed to be delivered by the teacher to the children. Brown (2008) further indicates that there is evidence to suggest that such materials are ineffective in multi-grade teaching.

2.6.5 Classroom Management

Taole and Mncube (2012:160) also point out that classroom management is another problem in regards to multi-grade teaching. It was observed that, while the educator is busy with one group, the other group would be busy with a task to complete. This task will then be completed without the educator's input or supervision. In most instances the learners do not even complete the tasks assigned to them. The teachers do not even ask learners about the task, as it was used solely to keep them busy while the educator is teaching the other group. Teachers also indicated that they use the same amount of time to teach different grades in a class than one would use to teach just one grade. This, according to Taole and Mncube (2012:160), calls for training in time management for teachers who teach in multi-grade classes.

What can be deduced from the discussion above is that there are several challenges which teachers in multi-grade classes experience. These challenges need to be addressed to the success of multi-grade teaching. The success of multi-grade teaching depends on the determination and support by different stake holders, rather than solely on the teacher.

2.7 TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL MULTI-GRADE TEACHING

Miller (1991:10) argues that, at first look, the skills needed to teach well in multi-grade and single-grade classrooms appear to be quite similar. The difference between the two sorts of classrooms may be more a product of socialisation and expectation than fact. He indicates that, if a teacher in either sort of classroom fails to address differences among students, the effectiveness of instruction suffers. Likewise, teachers are harmed when they have not been adequately prepared to teach students with varying ages and abilities, no matter what sort of classroom they work in. He further points out that when student diversity increases, whether it is in a multi-grade or single grade classroom, greater demand is placed on the teacher's resources, both cognitive and emotional.

Berry (2001:549) argues that whole class teaching approaches associated with mono-grade classroom do not favour low-achieving students. At the same time, while opportunities for heterogeneous group work in multi-grade classrooms do appear to assist low achievers, they are less beneficial for high achievers. Approaches to instruction which address the needs of all levels of achievement in primary classrooms are required. Berry (2001) describes three strategies that can be used, namely peer tutoring, cooperative group work, and differentiated whole-class teaching.

2.7.1 Peer Tutoring

In this strategy, the learners act as teachers of other learners. Peer instruction engages students during class through activities that require each student to apply core concepts being presented, and then to explain those concepts to their fellow students. This will promote sharing of knowledge, thus, promoting meaningful engagement among learners in the classroom (Taole & Mncube, 2012:154).

Berry (2001:549) points out that, in terms of reading development, gains in both cognitive and affective domains are claimed for paired reading, which is one particular type of peer tutoring activity. This technique, according to Berry (2001:549), requires few resources and would be relatively easy to implement in conjunction with classroom libraries.

2.7.2 Cooperative Group Work

According to Cohen (1994), cooperative group work occurs when students work together in a group small enough for each student to participate in clearly assigned collective tasks, usually independent of the teacher (Berry, 2001:549). Berry also maintains that this is a potentially useful strategy in both multi-grade and mono-grade classrooms because it can allow the teacher to assign work to groups of students in the knowledge that they will then be able to work productively.

2.7.3 Differentiated Whole- Class Teaching

Miller (1991:11) states that multi-grade teachers recognise that whole-class instruction must revolve around open task activities if all students are to be engaged. A major weakness with the whole-class teaching technique is that it is not targeted at different levels of achievement in the class (Berry, 2001:549). According to Berry (2001:549), there are ways in which whole-class teaching can be made more sensitive to a range of student needs. He is of the idea that shared reading is a potentially useful whole-class teaching strategy. In this strategy, the teacher reads, together with the students, from a large-format book and asks questions at a level appropriate to the range of achievement in the class.

2.8 MINIMUM CONDITIONS FOR ENSURING THAT MULTI-GRADE TEACHING IS BENEFICIAL FOR LEARNERS

Given the negative attitudes held by many teachers towards teaching in multi-grade classrooms and the extent and nature of multi-grade schools and classes, several conditions need to be met in order to make the learning setting beneficial for learners (Little, 2004:12). Brown (2008:38) and Little (2004:12) present the following examples as the fundamental aspects to be met:

2.8.1 Teacher Attitude

Brown (2008:38) states that evidence suggests that many teachers are negative towards teaching in multi-grade classrooms. General literature suggests that teachers prefer single grades because multi-grade classes mean more planning, preparation, organisation and work, catering for a wider range of abilities and maturity, less time for meeting individual student needs and for remediation, less time for reflection on teaching, lack of relevant professional training, and less satisfaction with their work. He argues that the attitude teachers take to the multi-grade environment is one such issue, which must be addressed in teacher training.

2.8.2 Increased Awareness

Little (2004:13) argues that many policymakers, planners, professional support staff and the public at large, are unaware of the extent and nature of the needs of multi-grade classes. He further indicates that since curriculum, educational materials, teacher preparation and assessment systems are predicated on mono-graded schools and classes, it is hardly surprising that many teachers hold negative attitudes towards their role in multi-grade class.

Little (2004:13) suggests that policymakers need to be aware of the multi-grade reality and then develop resources, planning, curriculum, materials, teacher preparation and assessment strategies, in collaboration with teachers. Multi-grade teachers should not be expected to adapt the general system to their specific multi-grade circumstances, alone.

2.8.3 Curriculum Adaptation

According to Little (2004:13), curricula premised on a single graded structure needs to be adapted to meet the needs of the multi-grade classroom. He maintains that this adaptation should be undertaken jointly between teachers, and guided and supported by curriculum experts working at national level. The adaptation must be sanctioned and validated by the highest authority. Little (2004:13) describes four curriculum adaptation strategies which have been shown to be effective in multi-grade classrooms:

- *Multi-year curriculum spans.* In this strategy, units of curriculum content are spread across two to three grades rather than one. All learners work through common topics and activities.
- *Differentiated curricula.* In this strategy the same general topic/theme is covered with learners. Learners in each grade group engage in learning tasks appropriate to their level of learning.
- *Quasi mono-grade.* In this strategy, the teacher teaches grade groups, in turn, as if they were mono-graded. Learners follow the same or different subject at the same time. Teachers may divide their time equally between grade groups or they may deliberately

divide their time unequally, choosing subjects or tasks within subjects that require different levels of teacher contact.

- *Learner and material-centred.* This strategy depends more on the learner and learning materials than on teacher input. The curriculum is translated in self-study graded learning guides. Learners work through these at their own speed with support from the teacher and structured assessment tasks. Learning is constructed as involving a relationship between learner, learning materials and teacher. According to Pridmore (2007:564), a well-known example of this strategy is the Escuela Nueva Programme of Colombia.

2.8.4 Transformation of the Philosophy of Learning

Little (2004:14) states that a more radical approach to curriculum is premised on a shift in philosophies of learning and teaching, from one that emphasises learner homogeneity and standardisation of teacher inputs to one that acknowledges the diversity of learners and the need for a differentiation of inputs. Little (2004) argues that this approach recognises that multi-grade teaching is, in principle, if not always in practice, a desirable teaching strategy in all classes, all schools and all countries. However, critics, according Brown (2008:39), argue that this suggestion may be more idealistic than real, especially since mono-grade class structures emerged out of multi-grade class contexts.

But like multi-grade classes, mono-grade classes comprise a diversity of student abilities, interests, backgrounds and ages (Little, 2001:494). Differentiation, according to Little (2004:14), refers to how the same teacher organises learning for different individuals and/or groups of learners. It can refer, variously, to the differences of subjects taught, differences of inputs/stimulus, differences of activities undertaken by students, differences of outcomes expected. While this type of differentiation can be observed in multi-grade and many mono-grade classes they are not generally built into the fabric of the national curricula (Little, 2004:15). He argues that this approach to curriculum does not undermine the value of whole class teaching, but rather encourages teachers to develop a repertoire of teaching approaches,

from the standardised to the differentiated and a range of support for learners, from materials, to peer learning, group learning and self-study.

The notion of diversity and differentiation challenges deep-seated cultures of teaching and learning in which the teacher is the main arbiter of knowledge, classroom activity is teacher-led, whole class teaching is dominant and all students (notwithstanding high rates of student absenteeism in many systems) are expected to progress through the curriculum at the same pace. Deep-seated cultures of teaching and learning pose the greatest obstacle to enduring reforms designed to meet the needs of multi-grade classrooms, though, as Croft (in Little, 2004:15) points out, differentiation based on groups may be more acceptable in collectivist cultures than differentiation based on individuals (Little, 2004:15).

Little (2004:15) points out that, nonetheless, there may be ways in which curriculum reforms might be undertaken to satisfy the needs of learners in multi-grade settings, even within teacher-led pedagogies. Experimental work on the reorganisation of national curriculum subjects built around the grading of activities in relation to core concepts/skills and differentiated activities and outcomes across the entire primary school curriculum is currently being undertaken in Nepal and Sri Lanka. The general idea is the creation of curricula which meets the needs of learners and teachers in multi-grade settings and reduces the daily curriculum planning burden in the teacher (Little, 2004:15). Multi-grade contexts, according to Lingam (2007), need innovative teachers who themselves require careful preparation (Brown, 2008:40).

2.8.5 Learning Materials

According to Little (2004:16), most researchers and practitioners agree that successful strategies for multi-grade teaching depend on adequate learning materials to support individual and group-based learning. He indicates that this enables teachers to spend time with some groups of learners while other learners work alone, in pairs or in small groups. Little (2004:16) cited the Escuela Nueva programme, in which study guides for individual learners were developed for each of the core curriculum subjects, as the best known example of this principle.

Little (2004:16) further points out that the mere existence of materials does not guarantee quality learning. Self- study materials must be of the highest quality and relevance, and must be used by teachers as part of an integrated teaching strategy, in which teachers continue to play a vital part. The availability of self-study materials must not be viewed by the teacher as a substitute for his or her teaching.

Conventional school textbooks are another learning resource deserving of attention. Textbooks are usually written on the assumption that lessons are teacher-led (Little, 2004:16). Little (2004:16), therefore, questions whether there is scope for development-work in the production of textbooks and whether there are any lessons to be learned from authors of examination crammers. He also questions how they reach their audience- the learner- so effectively.

2.8.6 The Social Organisation of Learners

Lingam (2007) states that effective multi-grade teaching involves the use of a range of organisational strategies in the classroom, which the teacher must be prepared to effect (Brown, 2008:41). These, according to Little (2004:16), will include the use of a whole class teaching, small groups, paired and self-learning. These strategies also include the involvement of learners in the general management of the classroom, the school and its learning resources (e.g. the use of monitors, the distribution of responsibilities for a wide range of class and school tasks, the use of class and school decision-making bodies).

2.8.7 Teacher Preparation

Pre-service and in-service training for teachers on the needs of the multi-grade class is vital. In some countries (e.g. Finland) multi-grade teaching is already embedded in the teacher education curricula. In England, multi-grade teachers express their desire for in-service training and curricula support for the multi-grade class, but generally has to rely on their training in the principles of diversity and differentiation in coping with the demands of multi-grade classes (Little, 2004:17).

Little (2004:17) argues that many in-service training programmes in multi-grade teaching adopt a cascade model of dissemination and, hence, are subject to many of the effective issues that face cascade training programmes more generally.

According to Suzuki (2004), a recent study of a ‘cascade’ multi-grade teacher training programme in Nepal, traced its effectiveness from content design at the national level to the training process at the local level and implementation of strategies in the classroom (Little, 2004:17). Little (2004) also points out that, although teachers made gains in their knowledge of useful strategies for multi-grade teaching (especially in the provision and use of self-learning activities and classroom monitors), evidence for the incorporation of learning of the training ‘messages’ at the classroom level was modest.

Suzuki (2004) does not only identify a number of areas where improvements could be made in the future, but he also identifies ‘hearts and minds’ obstacles that would endure even if training were to improve. These include the lack of awareness on the part of policymakers of the existence and needs of multi-grade classes, the absence of teacher trainers experts in the practices of multi-grade teaching, and the overwhelmingly negative attitudes held by teachers, their trainers, and supervisors (Little, 2004:17).

2.8.8 Assessment Systems

Little and Wolf (1996) indicate that educational assessment has many purposes. The most dominant purpose in most systems of education (and especially so in developing countries) is the selection for further education or occupations. The second is the monitoring and/or accountability and performance of the systems and schools. The third and, arguably the most important from an EFA perspective, is the promotion of learning through formative assessment (Little, 2004:18).

Hargreaves (2001), (Little, 2004:18), argues that multi-grade settings lend themselves to assessment systems in order to promote learning, because they encourage teachers to recognise individual differences in learning, rather than treating all learners as if they were at the same

level Little (2004:18) maintains that regular and frequent formative assessment is a vital tool for both teacher and learner in the multi-grade setting. He further argues that, although they lend themselves to recognition of diversity, multi-grade settings do not, in themselves, guarantee it, and strenuous efforts need to be made to build assessment into learning materials.

2.8.9 The Importance of Teacher Subject Knowledge and Skills

Brown (2008:41) states that, a growing body of research has found out that teacher expertise is the most important school factor that influences student achievement. He further argues that teachers who know a great deal about teaching and learning and who work in environments that allow them to know students well are critical elements of successful learning. This, according to Little (2005),(cited in Brown, 2008:41), is critical in multi-grade teaching contexts, where student diversity and differentiation is high.

Research suggests that multi-grade teachers, like other teachers, need, *inter alia*, a deep and flexible understanding of subject matter and how to represent ideas so that they are accessible to others (Brown, 2008:42). Darling-Hammond (2005) (cited in Brown, 2008:42) suggest that teachers need to develop pedagogical content knowledge that takes into account not only how to represent the topic under study, but also how the particular students they teach are likely to understand that material and how they learn. Brown (2008:42) also suggests that teachers also need to understand development that is how children and adolescents think and behave, what they are trying to accomplish, and how to help them grow in particular areas at particular ages in particular contexts.

2.9 CONCLUSION

The literature review revealed that there are indeed several problems experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes. From the discussion on multi-grade teaching reforms in other countries, it is evident that Colombia is playing a leading role in good multi-grade practices. The Colombian Escuela Nueva is the pioneering reform, which is often cited as the best practice in rural school

reform (McEwan, 2008:468). The Escuela Nueva reform programme, if effectively implemented, can yield positive results in multi-grade classes.

In Africa, Zambia has a good example of a multi-grade programme, which, according to Lugwangwa (1989:14), has positive outcomes in multi-grade teaching. Literature also indicates that in South Africa, very little has been done to ensure effective teaching and learning in multi-grade classes. If quality education is to be achieved in multi-grade classes, there is need for an effective multi-grade intervention in South Africa and, if possible, South Africa can learn from Colombian and Zambian experiences.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to identify challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes. The foregoing chapter highlighted the conditions under which multi-grade teaching arises, its prevalence, the challenges experienced by teachers teaching in this context, as well as the teaching strategies used in multi-grade classrooms.

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology employed to investigate challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in selected primary schools. Research methods are ways in which the researcher collects and analyses data. They are systematic and purposeful. In a broader context, the term methodology refers to a design whereby the researcher selects data collection and analysis procedures to investigate a specific research problem (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:8). The chapter also outlines of data collection techniques, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness of the research, as well as ethical considerations.

3.2 RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:315), is an inquiry in which researchers collect data in face to face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings (e.g. schools). The qualitative research method describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions.

The qualitative research approach is the most relevant design for this study due to the fact that I personally collected data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study (i.e. schools). It also allows data collection through multiple sources (Creswell, 2009:175).

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design describes how the study is conducted. It summarises the procedures for conducting the study, including when, from whom, and under what conditions the data were obtained (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:22). The study adopted a narrative inquiry. The narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research in which the researcher attempts to explore the lived experiences of people by probing them to answer the research question (Bleakley, 2005:534). According to Gray (2009:171), narrative inquiry explores how various elements are sequenced and explained. Gray (2009,171) further argues that narrative inquiry also enables the researcher to focus on the experiences of the participants. The rationale for using the narrative inquiry was to enable participants to give narrative responses to the research questions which guided this study and get more insight into the participants' lived experiences.

3.4 POPULATION

A population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:119). According to Gay (1992:124) the population is the group of interest to the researcher, the group to which the researcher would like the results of the study to be generalisable. De vos (1998:190) asserts that population refers to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics, or the total set from which the individuals or units of the study are chosen.

For the purpose of this study, the population consisted of all primary school teachers of multi-grade classes in the Nzhelele East Circuit. Nzhelele East Circuit is one of the 27 circuits found in Vhembe District in Limpopo Province. There are 36 primary schools in this circuit and 11 of them have multi-grade classes.

3.5 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

A sample is a group of subjects or participants from whom the data is collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:119). The sample of the study consisted of 14 teachers of multi-grade classes and six school principals from six sampled primary schools at Nzhelele East Circuit. Three of these schools have three multi-grade teachers each, two have two multi-grade teachers and one has one multi-grade teacher.

Sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals represent the larger group from which they were selected (Gay, 1992:140). According to Gay (1992:140), the purpose of sampling is to use a sample to gain information about a population.

For the purpose of this study, I used purposive sampling. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:319), purposive sampling involves selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study when one wants to understand something about those cases without needing or desiring to generalise to all such cases. Purposeful sampling is done to increase the utility of information obtained from a small sample. It requires that information be obtained about variations among the sub-units before the sample is chosen. In this study, I purposefully sampled schools that have multi-grade classes. Teachers who teach in multi-grade classes were also purposefully sampled. These are teachers who had first-hand experiences of teaching within the multi-grade contexts and were likely to answer the research questions of the study. Principals were also sampled purposefully. These are the principals of the six sampled schools with multi-grade classes.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Research involves gathering information about the variables in the study. The researcher chooses from a wide range of techniques and approaches to collect data from the subjects. Each method has advantages and disadvantages, and the specific approach adopted should be the best one for answering the research question (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:130).

The methods of data collection that I used comprised focus group interviews, face-to-face individual interviews and observation. Through interviews, I was able to explore participants' responses and examine their attitudes, feelings and values more easily. According to Creswell (2009:179), interviews allow the researcher control over the line of questioning. Creswell (2009:179) also indicates that, through observation, the researcher has first-hand experience with participants and that unusual aspects can be noticed during observation.

3.6.1 Interviews

Merriam (1999:71) describes interviews as a 'conversation with a purpose' where the interviewer elicits information from the participants. This type of information generally encompasses participants' opinions, feelings, experiences, meanings and intentions during the interview. In qualitative interviews, according to Creswell (2009:181), the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants, interviews participants telephonically, or engages in focus group interviews. He further indicates that these interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants.

In this study, I employed focus group interviews and face-to-face individual interviews. McMillan and Schumacher (2006:360) argue that focus group interview is used to obtain better understanding of a problem, concern or idea, and that by creating a social environment in which group members are stimulated by one another's perceptions and ideas, the researcher can increase the quality and richness of data through a more efficient strategy than through one on one interview. I conducted focus group interviews with teachers of multi-grade classes in three (3) schools where there were more than three multi-grade teachers. Each group consisted of three (3) participants. Focus groups were appropriate because these multi-grade teachers share the same experiences. Therefore, focus group provided them with the opportunity to share their thoughts before they answered the researcher.

I also conducted face-to-face individual interviews with five (5) teachers of multi-grade classes. This was done in schools where there were less than three multi-grade classes. The rationale for

using individual interviews is that there were only one or two multi-grade teachers in those particular schools. I also employed face-to-face individual interviews with principals of the sampled schools.

To create a conversational tone during interview, I used semi-structured question. Semi-structured questions, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:204), have no choices from which the respondent selects an answer. Rather, the question is phrased to allow for individual responses. A semi structured question is an open-ended question, which, however, but is fairly specific in its intent. In order to make follow-ups and ask individuals to explain their ideas in more detail or to elaborate on what they have said, I probed between questions to give respondents time to think before they responded. Because primary data of qualitative interviews are verbatim accounts of what transpires in the interview sessions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:355), a tape recorder was used to ensure completeness of the verbal interaction and to provide material for reliability checks.

3.6.2 Lesson observation

Observational research methods refer to a more specific method of collecting information that are very different from interviews or questionnaires. As a technique of gathering information, the observational method relies on the researcher seeing and hearing things and recording these observations, rather than relying on subjects' self-report responses to questions or statements (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:207).

I chose to observe how teachers present their lessons to multi-grade learners. Lesson observation offered me an opportunity to understand how learners of different grade levels are taught in the same setting by one educator. During lesson observation, I observed classroom management, discipline, teaching strategies, lesson presentation and how learners are assessed. My observation was guided by an observation sheet. The observation sheet was divided into three sections, namely general information, classroom information and classroom interaction.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

I sought permission to collect data within the sampled schools. I wrote a letter to the District Senior Manager requesting permission to conduct research (Appendix B). Permission to conduct research was also requested from the Circuit Manager (Appendix C) and principals of the sampled schools (Appendix D). Letters of informed consent were also sent to all participants and a protocol of informed consent was signed.

After permission was granted, I communicated telephonically with principals of each school to arrange suitable dates for data collection. Participants were interviewed at their respective schools and the duration of each interview was approximately 30 minutes. All interview sessions were tape recorded. I also wrote down notes during the interview. The same interview schedule was used for both focus group and individual interviews for teachers. A different interview schedule was used for school principals. Lesson observations were done in six multi-grade classrooms.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data is analysed primarily in an inductive manner which involves organising data into categories and identifying patterns among the categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:364). According to Creswell (2009:183), the process of data analysis involves preparing data for analysis, conducting different analysis, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and interpreting the larger meaning of the data. According to Creswell (2009:184), researchers must use the following steps to analyse data from the specific to the general:

- Organizing and preparing data for analysis. This involves transcribing interviews, typing field notes and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information;
- Reading through all data to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning;
- Coding the data. Coding is the process of organising the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information;

- Using the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people, as well as categories or themes for analysis;
- Interrelating themes to convey the findings of the analysis; and
- Interpreting the meaning of the data.

In this study, data obtained from focus groups and one-on-one interviews were transcribed and coded and responses grouped according to the questions asked. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The coded data were used to generate themes for analysis. The themes were then used to create sub-themes to obtain comprehensive meaning of data.

Data obtained from lesson observations were also categorically based on the predetermined categories used in the lesson observation sheet (See Appendix O).

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH

Trustworthiness, also called validity in qualitative designs, is the degree to which the interpretations have mutual meaning between the participants and the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:324). According to Creswell (2009:191), validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research, and it is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants or the readers of an account.

To ensure the validity of the research results, I used multi-method strategies to collect data. I used focus group and one-on-one interviews as well as observation. Observation analysis was triangulated with focus group and one-on-one interview. Triangulation is the cross-validation among data sources, data collection strategies, time periods, and theoretical schemes. To find regularities in the data, the researcher compares different sources, situations, and methods to see whether the same pattern keeps recurring. I used a tape recorder to record all interviews conducted in this study. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:326), mechanically recorded data provide accurate and relatively complete records.

Interviews were phrased in the participants' language, which enabled me to obtain a literal meaning of statements. Direct quotations from the data were used to illustrate participants' meanings and, thus, ensure validity.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

McMillan and Schumacher (2006:142) argue that ethics generally deal with beliefs about what is right or wrong, proper or improper, good or bad. They further argue that the primary investigator of the study is responsible for the ethical standards to which the study should adhere.

In this study, I gave participants assurances of confidentiality and anonymity and informed them about the intended use of the data. I explained to the participants that the information they provided would be treated with confidentiality and that neither the names of the participants nor their schools would be mentioned in the study. Pseudonyms were thus used to refer to participants and the schools were coded A to F. Participants were also informed that they had a choice to participate or not and that they could withdraw their participation at any time without penalty. I also asked participants to sign the consent forms before they participate in the research. Participants were also requested to sign a consent form to agree to participate in the interview and to the use of a tape recorder during the interview and also to agree on lesson observations.

I sought approval for research ethics clearance from the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee of Unisa. I sought permission from the Department of Basic Education in Vhembe District to carry out the research within the circuit under its supervision. I also sought permission from the Nzhelele East Circuit Manager, Principals of the sampled schools, as well as from the participants.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed about the research design and methodology I used to collect data. This was followed by a discussion of the population, sampling procedures, sample, data collection

techniques, data collection procedures and data analysis techniques. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations were also discussed.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an analysis and interpretation of interviews conducted with teachers and principals of multi-grade schools. Lessons that were observed also form part of this analysis and interpretation. The study was undertaken to investigate the challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes.

The first section presents participants' biographical information, and this is followed by analysis and interpretation of the interview responses and an analysis and interpretation of lesson observations. Pseudonyms are used to maintain participants' anonymity.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

The number of participants was 20. Fourteen were teachers and six were principals. Nine of the teachers were interviewed in three focus groups consisting of three participants each. Five were interviewed individually. Six Principals were also interviewed individually. Of the 14 teachers interviewed, 4 of them were males and 10 females. This confirms that teaching is a female dominated profession. Eight of these participants are over 60 years of age and 6 are between 46 and 59 years. This is due to the fact that the schools have not been employing new teachers because of the declining number of learners in these schools. Participants' experiences ranges from 10 years to 41 years, while their experience as multi-grade teachers range from six months to 20 years. This shows that these participants have been in the teaching profession for a long time and have, therefore, gained a lot of experience in the teaching and learning process. Five of the participants have the National Professional Diploma in Education, one has a Secondary Teachers Diploma, two have a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma and six have a post graduate qualification. All of these teachers are on post level 1. This can be attributed to the fact that all these schools do not qualify to have heads of departments and deputy principals posts. Out of the

six principals, five are males and one is a female. Four of them are over 50 years of age and two are between 40 and 49 years. Their years of teaching experience range from 10 years to 41 years, while their experience as principals ranges from six month to 24 years.

4.3 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS INTERVIEWS

From the individual and focus group interviews the following themes emerged:

- **Theme 1:** Teacher training and development
Sub-themes: - Teacher qualification
- Training in multi-grade teaching
- Teacher development

- **Theme 2:** Challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes
Sub-themes: - Curriculum organisation
- Work overload
- Classroom management
- Learner performance
- Lack of support

- **Theme 3** Curriculum implementation and management
Sub-themes: - Lesson planning
- Teaching strategies used by multi-grade teachers
- Assessment
- Curriculum management

- **Theme 4:** Teachers' attitude towards multi-grade teaching

- **Theme 5:** Measures that can be taken to ensure that there is effective teaching and learning in multi-grade classes.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Teacher Training and Development

4.3.1.1 Teacher qualifications

Out of the 20 participants, 11 have a National Professional Diploma in Education, two a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma, one a Secondary Teachers Diploma and six have post graduate qualifications. The minimum requirement for teacher's qualification is REQV 13. All the participants meet the requirement meaning that they are fully qualified to be teachers. However, none of the participants were trained to teach multi-grade classes during their teacher training.

4.3.1.2 Training in multi-grade teaching

When answering the question on training, most of the participants reported that they were not trained in multi-grade teaching. Only two of them said that they attended workshops for only two days long time ago. One of the participants also reported that the workshop he attended was just a briefing and that they were promised that further workshops will follow. According to this participant, these workshops never took place. It also emerged that, although the participants are multi-grade teachers, the only workshops they attend, are those intended for single grade teaching. Participants responded by saying:

***MATOZI:** We only went for a two days workshop and it was a very long time ago.*

***ELVIS:** I have never attended a workshop for multi-grade teaching.*

***MASHUDU:** I am not trained in multi-grade teaching. I only attended a workshop where we were just briefed about multi-grade teaching. We were not told anything in detail. We were promised that there will be other workshops in multi-grade teaching but that is not happening. The only workshops we attend are those intended for single grade classes*

***MARY:** No, we have never been trained on how multi-grade teaching works.*

Views from the participants suggest that multi-grade teachers are teaching in these classes without relevant knowledge and skills to teach in these classes. The fact that multi-grade teachers attend the same workshops as single grade teachers implies that these teachers are treated in the same way as single grade teachers. It also implies that these teachers have to adapt their general knowledge of teaching to their multi-grade classroom on their own.

When asked about the type of training they need, this is what they said:

***MATODZI:** Maybe if we are trained for two or three months, not two days. Maybe if we are trained for a longer time.*

***JUSTICE:** We need training in multi-grade teaching.*

***JANE:** Yes, we need that because we have just started with multi-grade and we don't know anything about it.*

***FRANK:** I think that if the department can introduce training in multi-grade teaching, even though it will still be difficult, maybe things will be better. It will enable us to know how to work in multi-grade classes, but now because just as we are with no training, we just make sure that at least learners are engaged with some work.*

From the above responses, one can deduce that there is need for training in multi-grade teaching. Teachers are willing to be trained and expect that such training to take place over a period of two to three months. Teachers are of the idea that if they are trained in multi-grade teaching, the teaching and learning process in these classes will improve.

4.3.1.3 Teacher development

In response to this question on teacher development most participants stated that there is nothing they are doing to develop themselves. One teacher mentioned that he is studying on a part time basis, but these studies have nothing to do with multi-grade teaching. They argue that multi-grade teaching is exhausting and strenuous. Therefore, all they do is to make sure that they are

teaching. One participant also lamented that she is old and thinks of retiring. Participants had this to say:

***SARAH:** There is nothing we do, we just make sure that we are teaching. Can you imagine teaching eight subjects alone, what can you do? It is exhausting.*

***MASHUDU:** I don't have any way to do that. Multi-grade is so strenuous. I am old and am thinking of retiring.*

***FRANK:** We have furthered our studies on part-time basis, but it has nothing to do with multi-grade teaching.*

These responses suggest that there is no development of any kind for these teachers. Teachers do not know of any strategies to develop competence in multi-grade teaching. The fact that some of them are studying on part-time bases is an indication that they are eager to learn but do not know of how to develop their competence in multi-grade teaching. Their responses also reveal that these teachers are frustrated. They put more emphasis on the fact that multi-grade is strenuous and exhausting.

When participants were further asked whether they have knowledge of all the subjects they teach, they said that they do not. The following are the participants' responses:

***JANE:** No, we don't have the knowledge of all these subjects. We just teach them because we have to. It is not easy to work in a multi-grade classroom.*

***FRANK:** It does not matter as to whether you know the subject or not, you have to take it because we are only two and learners have to be taught.*

***ELVIS:** NO. We don't, we just struggle with these subjects and it is not good for the learners because in most cases teachers concentrate on the subject they are comfortable with and neglect the others.*

These responses suggest that there is no teacher development of any kind for these teachers and that when subject allocation is done, their knowledge on the subject is not considered. Some of the subjects are neglected as teachers only concentrate on the subjects they are knowledgeable about.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Challenges Experienced by Teachers of Multi-grade Classes

Participants in this study argue that they experience various challenges in multi-grade classes. They pointed out that curriculum organisation, work overload, classroom management, learner performance and lack of support are their challenges.

4.3.2.1 Curriculum organisation

Participants also argued that curriculum organisation is one of their challenges. They indicated that it is difficult to work in these classes because they have two different grades in the same classroom each with its own curricula. They mentioned that, although they are in multi-grade classes, each grade has pace setters which they are expected to follow . Participants had this to say:

***MUKONDI:** The content cannot be completed. I cannot work according to the pace setters. I cannot work with both Grade 2 and Grade 3 pace setters. It is not possible.*

***ELVIS:** The first problem is the curriculum. You cannot teach according to the pace setter because if it is a Grade 4 pace setter it is meant for teaching Grade 4 learners only. But here learners are combined. For instance, if you are teaching Grade 4 and 5 classes and you are teaching Social Sciences Grade 4, you have to teach them separately because the content is not the same as the content for Grade 5.*

These sentiments suggest that curriculum organisation is a challenge for teachers in multi-grade classroom. The fact that each grade has its prescribed curriculum is problematic for these

teachers. Failing to complete the curricula for each grade implies that effective learning in these classroom is compromised.

4.3.2.2 Work overload

Participants alluded to the fact that there is too much work for teachers in multi-grade classrooms. They assert that there is too much planning in multi-grade classes and that they also have to prepare two assessment tasks per subject and this is a lot of work. They argue that, although they have few learners in their classrooms, the number of subjects they teach is too much. They complained of not getting time for themselves. It was also mentioned that in an attempt to finish the prescribed syllabus, they have to teach after normal school hours. Participants put it in this way:

***MUKONDI:** I have a lot of work to do. There is lot of preparation involved in multi-grade teaching. I cannot finish the work schedule and, as a result, I have to do afternoon studies with these learners.*

***LUFUNO:** The challenge that affects me the most is that, whenever I prepare for a lesson, I have to prepare two different lessons. I also have to prepare tasks for both grades. This leaves you with no time for yourself because you also have to come to school very early or remain after school in order to teach the other grade on its own. There are many challenges. Even the work is very tiring because it is too much. And you cannot concentrate on learners individually.*

***ELVIS:** Another thing is that there is too much work in these classrooms, because you teach subjects as in a normal class, even though we have few learners, the subjects are too many for us to teach. Like now, there are only two teachers for Grades 4 to 7. This means that all the subjects in these grades have to be shared between the two teachers.*

***MARY:** Another thing is that, because we are a small staff, we also have to do office work, which also interferes with the teacher's work in the classroom. You will find that you are busy with the learners, you receive a call saying that this or that is needed. You*

have to leave the class and go to the office to work. There is too much administrative work.

These responses suggest that teachers are dissatisfied about teaching in multi-grade classes because there is too much work to be done, and this compels them to work extra hours. It was also revealed that despite being overloaded with classroom responsibilities, teachers also have to perform school administrative duties. This is due to the fact that, because of the small learner enrolment in the schools, there are no deputy principals and heads of departments to help with the administration of the school. The dissatisfaction shown by these teachers is a matter of concern as it is a source of negative attitudes towards multi-grade teaching.

4.3.2.3 Classroom management

Participants stated that there is too much noise in their classrooms. They mentioned that while they are busy with one group, the other group will be playing. This happens despite the fact that they are given a task to complete. They put it in this way:

***MATODZI:** Another problem is that when you are teaching Grade 4 learners and they are failing to answer questions, those in Grade 5 are tempted to interfere. They start assisting those in Grade 4 with answers because they know the content. They have been taught the previous year. This disturbs the lesson.*

***MAANDA:** My challenge is the noise. They don't keep quiet when you are busy with the other grade. Even when you have given them work to do.*

The above responses suggest that these teachers struggle with managing their classrooms. Learners are grouped according to grades and taught separately. While the teacher is busy with one group, the other group is given a task to complete. They are expected to complete the task without the teacher's supervision and this is difficult for these learners. They often make noise and interfere with the other lesson.

4.3.2.4 Learner performance

Participants raise learner performance as one of their challenges. They indicated that learners do not perform to their best ability because there is no time for learners' individual needs to be addressed. They also indicated that learners' progress to the next grade without acquiring all the necessary skills is a problem. Participants put it in this way:

***MASHUDU:** These learners progress to the next grade without acquiring all the required skills. They progress without acquiring all the necessary skills because there is little time for teaching. When you are teaching one grade, the other grade will just be sitting and waiting for their turn to be taught.*

***LUFUNO:** There are many challenges because, with regard to learners, when we are teaching in these combined classes, learners do not perform to their best ability because I don't have time for individual learners. That is the first challenge I see.*

***MUKONDI:** The first thing is that learners take time to understand because there are two grades in one classroom. A dull learner becomes worse because I don't have time to help him individually. I am not able to do that because I have two grades to teach. There will be grade two learners who are behind and also grade three learners who are behind, and I cannot help them at the same time because what they do is different. So a slow learner gets worse.*

From these responses it is clear that these teachers believe that multi-grade teaching does not yield positive results on learners' performance. They argue that having to teach two grades with different curricula does not afford them adequate time to complete the curriculum. According to some of the participants, learners who are less competent get worse because there is no time for remedial work.

4.3.2.5 Lack of support

Lack of support was also raised as one of the challenges experienced by multi-grade teachers. Participants argue that they do not receive any support from curriculum advisors to teach in

multi-grade classes. They further advanced that whenever curriculum advisors visit their schools, they expect to see everything for each grade and that they expect them to work like normal schools. Participants had this to say:

***MARY:** Since I started working here, I have never received any support with regard to multi-grade teaching. I have never received such support. There was a time when one of the curriculum advisors came and we told him that we are experiencing difficulties with multi-grade classes. What he said is that we, as the people in the situation, we are the ones who can help them because we are in the situation every day, whereas we were expecting them to help us in order for us to get some relief. They are unable to help us. Curriculum advisors do come here, but they only want what they are here for. Curriculum advisors for Social Sciences, or English are the ones who often come here and they will be looking for what they are here for, for example lesson plans, record sheets. They want to see them. But they don't show us how it is done. There is no support from them. They only want us to work like a normal school.*

***MASHUDU:** There is no support. There is no single day when curriculum advisors have shown some understanding that we are a multi-grade school. You will find that they want lesson plans for Maths Grade 4, Maths Grade 5, Maths Grade 6 and Maths Grade 7. All these lesson plans have to be there. When we indicate that we are a multi-grade school, they acknowledge that they are aware but expect us to have all the lesson plans separated according to grades.*

***JUSTICE:** Curriculum advisors don't help us with anything. In fact, they give us pressure. When they come here they don't care that we are a multi-grade school. They want to see everything per grade.*

These responses imply that multi-grade teachers do not receive any support from curriculum advisors and that curriculum advisors do not consider the fact that they teach in multi-grade classrooms. Although they are working in a multi-grade teaching context, they are treated as single grade teachers. Visits by curriculum advisors to these schools only exert pressure on the already burdened teachers. The responses also reveal that teachers in multi-grade classrooms are

frustrated. The fact that curriculum advisors are unable to help these teachers shows that there is lack of awareness and knowledge about multi-grade teaching by curriculum advisors.

It also emerged that principals are also not able to offer any support to teachers as they also have their classes to teach. One of the principals said:

It is very much difficult to find yourself working in a school with multi-grade classes. You cannot provide them with your full support because you also don't have time. It is just a matter of sitting down with them and asks them how things are going. They will tell you that things are hard and you will just tell them to do this and that. You don't even have time for class visit, it is difficult, and there is no time, because when you will be sitting down in another teacher's class your learners will be alone. Primary school learners cannot work by themselves; they need a teacher to be with them.

This confirms that multi-grade teachers are left to deal with multi-grade teaching alone. They have to find a way of working in these classes by themselves. One of the teachers also mentioned that she relies on another teacher from another circuit for assistance. This implies that there is also no coordination between multi-grade teachers within the circuit and, thus, they are professionally isolated.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Curriculum Implementation and Management

4.3.3.1 Lesson planning

According to the participants, lesson planning is done differently in these schools. Some participants said that they plan lessons for each grade while others said they plan for one grade, a higher grade. Another participant said that she only prepares one lesson, for Grade 3, which is a higher grade, but includes content for Grade 2 in that lesson. Participants who separate lesson plans also indicated that they have to do that because when curriculum advisors visit the school, if they want to see a lesson plan for a specific grade, they expect to be provided with that. They do not consider the fact that the teacher is teaching a multi-grade classroom. Those who prepare

one lesson said teaching higher grade content will help those in lower grades to progress to a higher grade having been taught content in that grade. Participants had this to say:

***LUFUNO:** I plan different lessons because the Grade 1's are still starting with the sound "la", and the Grade 3's are now reading the sound "tshi". I plan lessons for each grade.*

***MUKONDI:** I only prepare one lesson, for Grade 3. When I prepare my lesson, I include Grade 2 things. Things in Grade 2 and 3 are have to move from Grade 2 to Grade 3.*

***FRANK:** In the higher grades, we have one lesson plan. If it is a Grade 4 and 5 class, (I mostly use these grades as an example), we prepare a lesson for Grade 5, and teach all these learners these things which are mostly Grade 5 content and only touch a little bit of Grade 4 work to make them understand. Those who are in Grade 4 will progress to Grade 5 having done at least things they are supposed to do in Grade 5.*

However, one participant later changed her response and said that they do not have lesson plans. She argued that they work in such a way that they do not have time to write their lesson plans. She puts it in this way:

To be honest, we don't have them (lesson plans) as such. The way we are working, we don't have free periods, there is nothing, and there is no time to do anything else. I just look at what I am going to teach and make a rough preparation.

The manner in which lesson plans are done shows that lesson planning is a challenge for teachers in multi-grade classes. Some of these learners are treated as if they are in the same grade even though they are different, while other teachers concentrate on the higher grade. This can be attributed to lack of policy guidance and training in multi-grade teaching. One may also assume that there is no proper planning by most of the participants. Some of them were even reluctant to respond to the question on lesson planning. These can be attributed to the lack of training and resources for multi-grade teaching.

4.3.3.2 Teaching strategies used by multi-grade teachers

Almost all participants wanted clarity on the question about the teaching methods. After clarification, their responses were as follows:

SARAH: *I usually use the peer method, especially in Mathematics. Learners who are able help those with difficulties while I am busy with the other group.*

FRANK: *We use different methods, especially group methods and others, depending on the lesson. There is no single method that we can say we use. We use different methods.*

MATODZI: *We don't have any methods that we use. We use the same methods that are used in single classes.*

LUFUNO: *The method which I mostly use in Grade 3 is to give them work to complete on their own. They read from their books. In Grade 1, I work with the learners. I read for them and then teach them because they still need the teacher's help.*

Although the participants seem not to be sure of the teaching methods they are talking about, they mentioned that they use different methods such as the peer method and the group method. These teaching strategies are amongst the teaching strategies that are said to be effective in multi-grade teaching. Some participants mentioned that they used the same methods as those used in single grade classes. However, they did not elaborate on which teaching methods they are referring to. Some participants, especially in the lower grades, reported that they give learners a task from their books to complete while they read for learners and teach them because learners are still young to work on their own. This implies that they are using the text book method. This can be attributed to the fact that teachers are not trained in multi-grade teaching.

4.3.3.3 Assessment

In response to this question, participants advanced that they assess learners separately according to their grades. They reported that each grade gets its tasks based on the curriculum. This is what they said:

***MERCIA:** We assess learners according to the policy document. You look at the particular grade and the term to see what is to be assessed. We assess them according to their grades.*

***MAVIS:** In the lower grade, we assess them based on the policy. It means that when I am giving them activities or assessing them, I prepare an activity for Grade 2, which is suitable to their level and another one for Grade 3s.*

***MARY:** when we assess learners informally, we give them the same tasks, especially in subjects like languages because the content is almost the same. When it comes to formal tasks, we receive common exam papers. We are, therefore, compelled to separate these learners. Each grade will then write exams for their grade.*

Most responses show that learners are assessed separately according to their grades and based on the policy document. Participants mentioned that, whenever they want to assess learners, they prepare two different tasks. However, some participants reported that, in subjects like languages, they only assess them separately in formal assessment tasks. During informal assessment tasks they are given the same tasks because the content is almost the same. It also surfaced that the common assessment tasks that they receive from the district office are set per grade. This suggests that, although different grades are placed in the same classroom, they are not treated as if they are in the same grade and that the learners' differences in learning are recognised. However, some participants contend that assessing learners separately does not only entails much work for the teacher but it is also time consuming as teachers sometimes have to spend the whole day administering a test for one grade, especially in the lower grades. One participant said this:

ANNA: YES, if it is Tshivenda, I prepare two tasks and also two tasks for English, but it is painful on the teacher and also makes my work to be slow. I also delay other teachers because it takes time to administer tests for two grades. It takes time, and I delay other teachers. Sometimes I spend the whole day busy with one task. Sometimes the school closes without issuing the reports because I will still be behind.

4.3.3.4 Curriculum management

Participants also advanced that curriculum management is one of their challenges. They indicated that it is difficult to complete the prescribed syllabus because they have two different grades each in the same class with different curricula. Participants had this to say:

MASHUDU: It is difficult to complete the syllabus because each grade has its syllabus to be followed and you have to divide your time between the two grades. It is very difficult.

FRANK: Maybe if we are looking at the first challenge being that, sometimes when you want to teach content which is meant for a specific grade, we just touch here and there because the grades are combined. Most of the work is meant for a higher grade. It means that learners of the lower grade are not getting their complete curriculum and that we are teaching what is difficult for them. It means that I have to go back and begin from a lower grade so that those in the lower grades may understand. It's a challenge.

ELVIS: I, mostly in Grade 6 and 7, do not follow the programme prescribed for us. I look for content which is similar in both grades; you will find that what is taught in Grade 7 is a continuation of what is done in Grade 6, so I teach that part beginning from Grade 6 work to Grade 7 grades. In that way I know I have covered both grades.

The above responses suggest that curriculum management is problematic in multi-grade classes. Participants argue that because they have more than one different curriculum to pursue, they are unable to complete content prescribed for each grade. Some participants said that when they teach, they look for content which is similar in both grades and teach that content, starting from the lower grade content to the higher grade content. However they argue that, despite doing that, they are unable to complete the prescribed syllabus because of time. Some participants argue

that, in an effort to complete the syllabus, they do not teach in detail; they just touch here and there and mainly concentrate on the higher grades. This suggests that learners' progress to the next grade without acquiring requisite skills.

It also emerged during the principals' interviews that time is also wasted on workshops. It was mentioned that, due to the fact that a single teacher is responsible for a number of subjects alone, attending workshops for several days is difficult. This means that all those days when the teacher is away, learners are left alone. One principal put it this way:

It is very difficult to complete the syllabus, because teachers have a lot of work. They are unable to finish the curriculum. Sometimes teachers are not at the school. It is difficult for them to cover the curriculum because teachers have to attend workshops for each of the subjects they teach, and during their absence, the curriculum does not move. By the time they come back, time will be gone and the exams will be written before they have covered the curriculum.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Teachers' Attitude towards Multi-grade Teaching

Participants were asked about their general feelings towards multi-grade teaching. Participants argued that multi-grade teaching is stressful because it involves too much work. They also stated that it might be better for each grade to have its own teacher. Some participants are of the idea that multi-grade teaching must be phased out. Participants had this to say:

***JUSTICE:** I can say that multi-grade teaching is stressful.*

***FRANK:** My feeling is that multi-grade teaching must be phased out. Every class must have its own teacher. If it is Grade R, it must have a teacher, and if it is Grade one class, it must also have a teacher. They must look at the grades and not the number of learners. Multi-grade is reducing the learners' knowledge. They have very little knowledge.*

Justice continued to say:

It is boring, everyday day of your life, when you arrive home, you will feel like you are dying. You can imagine standing from 7h30. Sometimes we don't even get a break. It is stressful.

***MASHUDU:** No, multi-grade teaching is not a good thing; it is bad for the teacher. It causes stress because of the learners. If a learner is failing, I cannot help her individually. Because if it was only a Grade 2 class, I would be able to have contact time with learners for the whole day. But because there is also Grade 3 and the assessment standard and content are different. Whenever I am busy with the Grade 3, it is wasted time for Grade 2.*

From the above responses, one can deduce that these teachers have a negative attitude towards multi-grade teaching. Teachers feel that there is too much work in multi-grade classrooms. They complained that they do not get time to rest and, sometimes, even to eat. They asserted that sometimes when the grades are combined they end up with many learners in one classroom, which makes it difficult to manage the class. The fact that they want each class to have its own teacher is an indication that they prefer teaching single grade classes. They argued that it is better to have a single-grade classroom with many learners than having a multi-grade classroom with a few learners. Some participants were unhappy about the performance of learners in multi-grade classes. They argued that lack of time for remedial work means that learners who are struggling to understand concepts do not get individual assistance from teachers. This is a matter of concern because effective teaching and learning cannot be ensured if teachers do not have a positive attitude towards what they are doing.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Measures that can be taken to Ensure that there is Effective Teaching and Learning in Multi-grade Classes

Responding to the question on what can be done to ensure that there is effective teaching and learning in multi-grade classes, participants proposed that the Department of Education should employ teachers without considering the number of learners in the school. They argue that

effective teaching and learning will only be achieved if the number of teachers in the school equals the number of grades. This is what they said:

***MUKONDI:** What the department can do is to ensure that every grade should have its own teacher. It is then that it can see how effective teachers can be. Yes, each grade must have its own teacher regardless of the number of learners because in private schools, each grade has its own teacher even if it does not have many learners.*

***JUSTICE:** I think what can help is to employ educators. There should be a minimum number of teachers for multi-grade schools. Maybe if they can give a minimum of five teachers for multi-grade schools. But what is best is to have a teacher in each grade things will be normal like in other schools. Every grade with its teacher, will enable the teachers to concentrate on learners the whole day. Even the teachers' work will be clean. I think that will help.*

***ANNA:** The government must employ educators without considering the number of learners, you see long ago, during the times of the late President Mphephu, he never considered the number of learners in a class. Each grade had its teacher. But now they consider the number of learners. The government must employ teachers without considering the number of learners so that the teacher can concentrate on his/her grade. When learners are failing Grade 12, multi-grade teaching is a contributory factor because learners are progressing without being taught the appropriate things.*

These responses reflect that teachers are sceptical about ensuring effecting teaching and learning in multi-grade classes. To them the only way out is to have more teachers in these schools. They proposed that the department should not consider the number of learners in a school when they allocate teachers, but the number of grades in that school. One participant suggested that it would be better if they allocate at least five teachers to all small schools just to ease the burden. One participant also referred to what used to be done during the times of the late president of the then Republic of Venda, Mr Mphephu. She said that during that time, learner enrolment was never considered when teachers were employed in a school. Each grade was given its teacher.

Principals also argued that there is nothing that can be done except employing more educators. They argued that the performance of learners in multi-grade schools cannot be compared with that of learners in single grade schools. One participant said that one teacher cannot be expected to teach all subjects in a grade and to produce good results. The participant put it in this way:

TSHILIDZI: For the department, it should be better to give us more teaching staff members. It is not normal for one educator to teach all learning areas in one grade. It is not normal for the educator to struggle. Quality learners cannot be produced by the system. It should be better for the department itself to add extra staff so that teachers share the normal loads. They mustn't consider the enrolment, no; to us it does not apply because if they apply that rule, it affects the school.

4.4 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA OBTAINED THROUGH LESSON OBSERVATION

4.4.1 Combination of Grades and the Number of Learners per Grade

Table 4.1: Combination of Grades and Number of Learners per Grade

	Grades Combined	Number of Learners per Grade	Total Number of Learners in a Class
Class A	Grade R	12	53
	Grade 1	15	
	Grade 2	11	
	Grade 3	15	
Class B	Grade R	11	48
	Grade 1	9	
	Grade 2	13	
	Grade 3	15	
Class C	Grade 4	12	22
	Grade 5	10	

Class D	Grade 1	26	43
	Grade 3	17	
Class E	Grade R	23	42
	Grade 1	19	
Class F	Grade 4	16	39
	Grade 5	23	

Table 4.1 shows that there are multi-grade classes with a high number of learners. The Department of Basic Education prescribes that the learner-teacher ratio should be 35.9: 1. This means that 1 teacher is responsible for 35.9 learners which is then converted to 36 learners. From the above table, it is clear that in some schools, multi-grade teachers have to contend with teaching a classroom with a large number of learners. This also confirms that there is indeed work overload for these teachers.

4.4.2 Sitting Arrangement

In most of the classrooms, I observed that learners are grouped separately according to their grades. This finding confirms what participants in teachers' interviews stated. This implies that, although learners of different grades occupy one classroom, learners are placed as separate grades. However, there are some classes in the intermediate phase where learners of different grades are mixed in groups. Teachers in these classes explained that the purpose of doing that is to ensure that learners may help each other in their respective groups.

4.4.3 Instructional Materials

There are instructional materials for all the grades in the classroom and teachers use them for the grades that they are prescribed for. Participants also reported that they use the textbook for the grades they are teaching. This suggests that there are no instructional materials written for multi-grade classes.

4.4.4 Learner Involvement

Learners in these classes are taught separately according to their grades. While the teacher is busy with the other grade, learners in the other grade are given a task to complete. The teachers only interact with the group they are busy with while the other group is completing a task without any supervision by the teacher. This was also mentioned during the teachers' interviews. I also noticed that learners are mainly not involved in the lesson. In most instances, teachers are the ones who are imparting information, while learners are listening. Only a few questions are asked during the lessons.

4.4.5 Teaching Strategies

All the teachers in the classrooms I observed used the teacher and the textbook method. This is contrary to what the participants put forward during the interview. None of the mentioned during the interviews was used in these classrooms. According to Berry (2001:549), approaches to instruction which address the needs of all levels of achievement in primary school are required. He described three strategies that can be used, namely: peer tutoring, cooperative group work, and differentiated whole-class teaching. In the lessons I observed, the teacher is the depositor of knowledge, while learners are the recipients. Teachers read from the text book or workbook and teach. Learners are then given a task from either the textbook or workbook.

4.4.6 Assessment

Learners in most of these classes are assessed differently according to their grades. Learners in each grade are given their own tasks which are different from those given to the other grade. This confirms what some participants said during interview question number 8. This implies that, although learners of different grades are placed in one class, they are not treated as if they are in the same grade. Teachers recognise learners' individual differences. However, there are some classes in the intermediate phase where learners are given the same informal assessment tasks. Learners in these grades are taught together as one group and then given the same assessment task.

4.4.7 Lesson Plan

Some of these teachers have teaching plans and others do not. Those who have them are kept in their files and are not followed by the teachers. Most of these teachers use the workbooks. From this finding, it can be deduced that lesson plans are done just to have something to show in case by curriculum advisors' visit the schools. During the teachers interviews some participants advanced that they prepare their lessons separately according to their grades because that is what curriculum advisors expect to see when they visit their schools. It is also for this reason that teachers prepare lesson plans not to use them for teaching but to keep them in their files for incase they are required during visits by curriculum advisors. There are also some teachers in the foundation phase who have lesson plans provided by the Department of Education, but teachers do not teach according to these plans.

4.4.8 Classroom Management

Teachers are unable to maintain discipline, especially in the lower grades. While the teacher is busy with one group, the other group, regardless of the fact that they have been given a task to complete, will be very noisy, thus interrupting the other lesson by reporting each other to the teacher. This confirms participants' responses during the interviews. When the teacher asks a question directed to a particular grade, learners in another grade, especially the higher grade shout the answers out without being asked by the teacher to give them.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In this Chapter I analysed and interpreted the participants' responses according to the themes developed from the interview questions on the challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in primary schools at Nzhelele East Circuit. Data obtained through lesson observation were also analysed and interpreted and then triangulated with participants' responses.

The analysis reveals that there are challenges facing multi-grade teachers and that these teachers are disillusioned about multi-grade teaching. A summary of the findings, recommendations and conclusions are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, data obtained during focus group interviews, individual interviews and lesson observations were analysed and interpreted. The purpose of this study was to identify the challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes. This chapter presents a summary of the literature review, summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations and recommendations for further study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This section discusses the research findings according to the themes that were drawn from the research questions that guided the study. The discussion focused on findings generated from the qualitative data obtained from focus group interviews, individual interviews and lesson observations. The following themes emerged from the questions:

THEME 1: Teacher training and development: The study revealed that teachers who are teaching in multi-grade classrooms are qualified teachers who meet the minimum requirement for appointment as teachers. However, these teachers are not trained in multi-grade teaching. In-service training for these teachers is also not adequate. There is also no teacher development with regard for multi-grade teaching teachers. Subject knowledge is also not considered when subjects are allocated to teachers.

THEME 2: Challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes: The findings of this study reveal that teachers of multi-grade classes face various challenges. The study revealed that curriculum organisation, work overload, classroom management, learner performance and lack of support are challenges experienced by multi-grade teachers.

THEME 3: Curriculum implementation and management: The study revealed that multi-grade teachers have difficulties with lesson planning. Some teachers plan their lessons as if they are going to teach single-grade classes. Some only prepare one lesson for the higher grade while some of them do not even have lesson plans. Teachers who have lesson plans do not follow those plans in their teaching but keep them in their files for record purposes.

The study also revealed that teachers are not familiar with teaching methods associated with multi-grade teaching such as peer tutoring, cooperative group work and differentiated whole class teaching. Teachers in these classes use the teacher and textbook method. The study also revealed that learners in these classes are assessed separately in both formal and informal assessment. This is also the case with the common assessment tasks they receive from the district.

It was also found that multi-grade teachers are unable to manage their curriculum. They are unable to complete the curriculum because they have to pursue grade appropriate curricula.

THEME 4: Teachers' attitudes towards multi-grade teaching: This study found that teachers have a negative attitude towards multi-grade teaching. Teachers prefer single grade classes because they are of the idea that multi-grade teaching involves a lot of work and that it is very stressful for the teacher.

THEME 5: Measures that can be taken to ensure that there is effective teaching and learning in multi-grade classes: Participants, in this study, believe that the only way to ensure that there is effective teaching and learning in multi grade classes is to employ more teachers in these schools. The study revealed that teachers are of the idea that the performance of learners in single-grade classes is better than that of learners in multi-grade classes. However, the literature review revealed that there are conditions that, if met, effective teaching and learning can be achieved. Those conditions are teacher attitude, increased awareness, curriculum adaptation, transformation of the philosophy of learning, learning materials, the social organisation of learners, teacher preparation, the assessment system and the importance of teacher subject knowledge and skills.

5.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were answered through the participants' responses, lesson observations and a literature review on multi-grade teaching.

5.3.1 Research Question 1: What are the Challenges Experienced by Multi-grade Teachers in Implementing the Curriculum?

The study revealed that there are several challenges experienced by multi-grade teachers. The study concludes the following as the challenges:

5.3.1.1 Curriculum organisation

Curriculum organisation is a challenge for multi-grade teachers. The study reveals that it is difficult for teachers to work in these classrooms because they have two or more grades in the same classroom each with different curricula in the same class. Brown (2010:194) also noted the same challenge and argues that generally in a multi-grade arrangement, although learners of different grades comprise one class, learners have to pursue grade appropriate curricula. Lingam (cited by Brown, 2010: 194) identifies this requirement as the greatest challenge of multi-grade teaching because it demands that the structure of the curricula, learning resources and assessment strategies employed in the multi-grade teaching and learning process should take a new shape from that of a single grade class.

5.3.1.2 Work overload

The study revealed that there is too much work involved for teachers in multi-grade teaching. According to this study, multi-grade teaching entails more work in terms of planning and assessment. Despite being overloaded with classroom responsibilities, teachers also have to do school administrative duties. According to Brown (2008:13), teachers prefer single-grades because multi-grade classes mean more planning, preparation, organisation and work.

5.3.1.3 Classroom management.

Classroom management is a challenge for multi-grade teachers. There is lack of discipline in these classes. Teachers are unable to work with two or more grades at the same time. The literature review suggests that, while the educator is busy with one group, the other group must be busy with a different task to complete. The task, however, is completed without the teachers the input or supervision. In most cases, the learners do not even complete the task assigned to them (Taole & Mncube, 2012:160).

5.3.1.4 Learner performance

The study revealed that learner performance is a concern in multi-grade classes. Teachers are of the perception that learners cannot perform to their best ability because there is no time for remedial work and that teaching two grades with different curricular does not afford them time to complete the curricular. This is contrary to what the literature review suggests. Literature review suggests that, in other countries where multi-grade reforms have been introduced, for example Zambia, it is believed that multi-grade teaching can have some positive outcomes. It is believed that it can enhance independent learning, encourages teachers revision of materials covered in earlier grades, increase pupil interaction and contribute to the country's act of universalising basic education (Lungwangwa, 1989:13).

5.1.1.5 Lack of support

The findings show that there is lack of support for multi-grade teachers. The study revealed that curriculum advisors do not provide them with any support for multi-grade teaching and that during their supervisions they do not consider that they teach in multi-grade classes. This is also shared by Little (2004:13). Little (2004) argues that many policy makers, planners, professional support staff and the public at large, are unaware of the extent and nature of the needs of multi-grade classes. The study also revealed that principals of these schools also do not provide support for these teachers as they also have their classes to teach.

5.3.2 Research Question 2: How do Multi-grade Teachers Manage the Implementation of the Curriculum in their Classrooms?

The study revealed that teachers of multi-grade classes struggle with lesson planning. Some teachers prepare their lessons as if they are going to teach single grade classes, while others do not even have a lesson plan. Teachers who have lesson plans do not even teach according to them; these are prepared in order to have something to show during the visits by curriculum advisors.

The study also reveals that multi-grade teachers, in these schools, are not familiar with teaching strategies associated with multi-grade teaching. Berry (2001:549) describes peer tutoring, cooperative group work and differentiated whole-class teaching as the main teaching strategies that can be used in multi-grade teaching. However, these teachers use the teacher and the textbook method.

The findings also show that learners in these classes are assessed separately according to their grades. Although learners of different grades are placed in one classroom, they are not treated as if they are in the same grade. According to Little (2004:18), multi-grade setting lends itself to assessment systems that promote learning, because they encourage teachers to recognise individual differences in learning rather than treat all learners as if they are at the same level.

It was also revealed that multi-grade teachers experience difficulties with curriculum management. The fact that each grade has its curriculum to pursue makes it difficult for them to complete the prescribed content for the grade. This was also highlighted in the literature review. According to Brown (2010:194), in the multi-grade arrangement, although learners of different grades comprise one class, learners have to pursue grade-appropriate curricula. He further points out that this requirement is one of the greatest challenges of multi-grade teaching.

5.3.3 Research Question 3: What Strategies can be used to make Teaching and Learning Successful within the Context of Multi-grade Teaching?

Teachers argued that the only thing that can make teaching and learning successful in multi-grade classes is to employ more teachers in these schools. They proposed that the number of teachers in a school should be determined by the number of grades in that particular school not the number of learners. They believe that there is nothing that can be done to improve the quality of teaching except employing more teachers. However, literature review proposed the conditions to be met, in order to make learning in multi-grade teaching beneficial for learners. The following are conditions as identified by Little (2004:12):

- Teacher attitude;
- Increased awareness;
- Curriculum Adaptation;
- Transformation of the Philosophy of Learning;
- Learning materials;
- Social organisation of learners;
- Teacher preparation;
- Assessment systems; and
- The importance of teacher subject knowledge and skills.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The study was undertaken with the intention to identify challenges experienced by multi-grade teachers in the implementation of the curriculum and to make recommendations on the strategies that could make teaching and learning successful within the context of multi-grade teaching. On the basis of the study, conclusions were made based on the findings of the study

Multi-grade teaching has a potential to improve the quality of teaching and it is essential in ensuring basic education for all. However, multi-grade teachers experience a number of challenges. Some of the challenges identified through this study are curriculum organisation, work overload, classroom management, learner performance and lack of support. These

challenges have a negative effect on the implementation of the curriculum. Teachers experience difficulties in lesson planning, teaching strategies, assessment and curriculum management.

The study also concludes that these challenges have led to the development of a negative attitude towards education. These teachers believe that effective learning and teaching can never be attained in multi-grade classes. However, based on the reviewed literature, the study concludes that, if these challenges are addressed, effective learning and teaching can be ensured within the multi-grade context.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations based on the research findings of this study were made. These recommendations are meant to address the challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in order to implement the curriculum effectively.

One of the recommendations is that the Department of Education should strengthen continued professional teacher development (CPTD) in teaching in multi-grade context. This will assist teachers with the skills required to teach in multi-grade classes. Another recommendation is that multi-grade teaching should also form part of the teacher training programme. These will help newly appointed teachers when they are employed in schools with multi-grade classes.

The Department of Education should also provide training in multi-grade teaching for professional staff such as curriculum advisors. This can empower them with the necessary knowledge needed to support teachers in multi-grade classes.

The study revealed that there are multi-grade classes in which four grades are placed in one classroom. The number of learners in such classes exceeds the stipulated learner-teacher ratio by far. The Department of Education should ensure that the number of grades in multi-grade classes does not exceed two. This will make these classes manageable, thus making curriculum implementation easier.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study on multi-grade teaching in primary schools can be explored further. I recommend the following further studies on multi-grade teaching in primary schools:

- Quality education for learners is very crucial and, therefore, challenges experienced by teachers should not be ignored. I, therefore recommend that future research should focus on the performance of learners in multi-grade classes.
- Principals have a crucial role in ensuring effective curriculum implementation in their schools. Further study could focus on how schools with multi-grade classes are managed.

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APPENDIX A

**LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY: DISTRICT
SENIOR MANAGER**

Contact No: 082 823 9963
Email:mulaudzisandra1@gmail.com

P.O BOX 3727
Louis Trichardt
0920

.....

The District Senior Manager
Vhembe District
P/Bag x 2270
Sibasa
0970

Dear Sir

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT MED RESEARCH IN NZHELELE
EAST CIRCUIT SCHOOLS**

**TITLE: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS OF MULTI-GRADE
CLASSES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS AT NZHELELE EAST CIRCUIT**

The above matter bears reference:

I, Muofhe Sandra Mulaudzi, under the supervision of Professor Taole M.J in the Department of Curriculum Studies am doing research towards an M Ed degree at the University of South Africa. I hereby request your permission to conduct a study entitled, ‘Challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in primary schools in Nzhelele East Circuit’

The study will entail interviewing the principals and teachers of selected primary schools with multi-grade classes. Interviews will be in the form of focus group interviews and face to face individual interviews. Focus group interviews will be done in schools where there are more than three teachers teaching multi-grade classes. Individual face to face interviews will be carried out at schools with one or two multi-grade classes. The expected duration of the interviews is one hour in length. Lesson observations will also be done in these classes. Data will be collected over a period of five weeks.

I also undertake to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity during the study, will be maintained and that data obtained will be kept in a safe place upon completion of the study. Participation will be voluntary at all times and participants will be allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Hoping for your positive response.

Yours sincerely

Mulaudzi M.S

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE DISTRICT MANAGER



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

VHEMBE DISTRICT

REF: 14/7/R
ENG: MATIBE M.S
TEL: 015 962 1029

MULAUDZI S
P.O.BOX 3727
MAKHADO
0920

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION VHEMBE DISTRICT
2015 -07- 06
PRIVATE BAG X2250 SIBASA 0970 LIMPOPO PROVINCE

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT MED RESEARCH IN NZHELELE EAST CIRCUIT SCHOOLS.

1. The above matter refers.
2. You are hereby informed that your request for permission to conduct research titled, " Challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in primary schools in Nzhelele East Circuit" has been granted.
3. We appreciate your commitment to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation by research subjects.
4. Kindly inform circuit managers and principals of selected schools prior to commencing your data collection.
5. Wishing you the best in your study.


DISTRICT SENIOR MANAGER

06/07/2011
DATE

Thohoyandou Government Building, Old Parliament, Block D, Private Bag X2250, SIBASA, 0970
Tel: (015) 962 1313 or (015) 962 1331, Fax: (015) 962 6039 or (015) 962 2288

The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people!

APPENDIX C

**LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY: CIRCUIT
MANAGER**

Contact no: 082 823 9963
Email:mulaudzisandra1@gmail.com

P.O BOX 3727
Louis Trichardt
0920

.....

The Circuit Manager
Nzhelele East Circuit
P/Bag X717
Nzhelele
0993

Dear Sir

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT M ED RESEARCH IN NZHELELE
EAST CIRCUIT SCHOOLS**

**TITLE: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS OF MULTI-GRADE
CLASSES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS AT NZHELELE EAST CIRCUIT**

The above matter bears reference:

I, Muofhe Sandra Mulaudzi, under the supervision of Professor Taole M.J in the Department of Curriculum Studies am doing research towards an M Ed degree at the University of South Africa. I hereby request your permission to conduct a study entitled, ‘Challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in primary schools in Nzhelele East Circuit’

The study will entail interviewing the principals and teachers of selected primary schools with multi-grade classes. Interviews will be in the form of focus group interviews and face to face individual interviews. Focus group interviews will be done in schools where there are more than three teachers teaching multi-grade classes. Individual face to face interviews will be carried out at schools with one or two multi-grade classes. The expected duration of the interviews is one hour in length. Lesson observations will also be done in these classes. Data will be collected over a period of five weeks.

I also undertake to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity during the study, will be maintained and that data obtained will be kept in a safe place upon completion of the study. Participation will be voluntary at all times and participants will be allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Hoping for your positive response.

Yours sincerely

Mulaudzi M.S

APENDIX D

PERMISSION LETER FROM THE CIRCUIT MANAGER



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

NZHELELE EAST CIRCUIT

REF: 54/1/1/1
ENQ: RAMUTSHELI M.D
TEL: 015 9730517/9
DATE: 22 JULY 2015

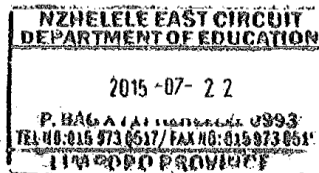
TO: MRS MULAUDZI M.S.

RECOMMEND APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT NZHELELE EAST CIRCUIT.

The above matter refers.
I would like to recommend the application to conduct research at Nzhelele East Circuit in Primary schools with multi grade classes.
The permission is given on the bases that your research will not disturb teaching and learning.

Hoping that you will find this in order.


.....
THE CIRCUIT MANAGER NZHELELE EAST CIRCUIT



APPENDIX E

**LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY: SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL**

Contact no: 082 823 9963
Email:mulaudzisandra1@gmail.com

P.O BOX 3727
Louis Trichardt
0920

.....

The School Principal

.....

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT MED RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

**TITLE: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS OF MULTI-GRADE
CLASSES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS in NZHELELE EAST CIRCUIT.**

The above matter bears reference:

I, Muofhe Sandra Mulaudzi, under the supervision of Professor Taole M.J in the Department of Curriculum Studies am doing research towards an M Ed degree at the University of South Africa. I hereby request your permission to conduct a study entitled, ‘Challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in primary schools in Nzhelele East Circuit’

The study requires me to interview principals, teachers of multi-grade classes. Interviews will be in the form of focus group discussion and face to face individual interviews. Lesson observations will also be done in these classes.

Your school has been selected because it is one of the schools with multi-grade classes and therefore, your experience in this area will be of great value.

I also undertake to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity during the study will be maintained and that data obtained will be kept in a safe place upon completion of the study. Participation will remain voluntary at all times and participants will be allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Hoping for your positive response.

Yours sincerely

Mulaudzi MS

APPENDIX F

**A LETTER REQUESTING TEACHERS TO PARTICIPATE IN A FOCUS GROUP
INTERVIEW**

PO BOX 3727

Louis Trichardt

0920

.....

Dear Teacher

REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN A FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

**TITLE: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS OF MULTI-GRADE
CLASSES IN NZHELELE EAST CIRCUIT**

This letter is an invitation to you to participate in a study on the challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in Nzhalele East Circuit. I, Muofhe Sandra Mulaudzi, am conducting this study as part of my MED Studies at the University of South Africa. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise in my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. The study requires me to interview you together with other teachers at your school as a group. In this interview, I would like to find out your views and opinions on this topic. The study also entails observing your lesson presentation. The information from both the focus group interview and lesson observation will be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning in a multi-grade context.

Your participation in this study should be voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately one hour in length. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

With your permission, the focus group discussion will be audio-recorded to facilitate the collection of accurate information, which will be later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcription has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or to clarify any points. All information provided will be considered completely confidential. Neither your name nor the name of your school will appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations will be used. Data collected during this study will be retained safely in a password protected computer for five years. There are no known anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign a consent form.

Yours sincerely

Mulaudzi MS

APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW ASSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I grant my consent to participate in a group discussion and that the information I share during the group discussions (focus group interview) may be used by the researcher, Mulaudzi M.S, for research purposes. I am aware that the group discussions will be digitally recorded and grant consent for these recordings. I also undertake not to share information shared in the group discussion with any person outside of the group, in order to maintain confidentiality.

Participant's Name (please print):.....

Participant's Signature:

Researcher's Name: **Muofhe Sandra Mulaudzi**

Researcher's Signature:.....

Date:

APPENDIX H

**A LETTER REQUESTING TEACHERS TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INDIVIDUAL
INTERVIEW**

PO BOX 3727

Louis Trichardt

0920

.....

Dear Teacher

REQUEST FOR TEACHERS TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW

**TITLE: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS OF MULTI-GRADE
CLASSES IN NZHELELE EAST CIRCUIT**

This letter is an invitation to you to participate in a study on the challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes I Nzhelele East Circuit. This study is part of my MED studies at the University of South Africa. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise in my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. The study requires me to interview you and observe your lesson. In this interview, I would like to find out your views and opinions on this challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes. This information from both the interview and lesson observation can be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning in a multi-grade context.

Your participation in this study should be voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately one hour in length. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if

you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

With your permission, the focus group discussion will be audio-recorded to facilitate the collection of accurate information, which will be later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcription has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or to clarify any points. All information provided will be considered completely confidential. Neither your name nor the name of your school will appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations will be used. Data collected during this study will be retained safely in a password protected computer for five years. There are no known anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign a consent form.

Yours sincerely

Mulaudzi MS

APPENDIX I

INDIVIDUAL TEACHER’S CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study on multi-grade teaching in education. I have had an opportunity to ask some questions related to this study, and received satisfactory answers to my questions. I wanted. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications which will come from this research. My understanding is that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all the foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Participant’s Name (Please print):

Participant Signature:

Date :

APPENDIX J

LETTER REQUESTING PRINCIPALS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

PO BOX 3727

Louis Trichardt

0920

.....

To the Principal

.....

Dear Sir/ Madam

REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

I am a Masters student at the University of South Africa under the supervision of Prof MJ Taole. I hereby request your consent to participate in my research study entitled is ‘**Challenges Experienced by Teachers of Multi-grade Classes in Nzhelele East Circuit**’.

Your participation will involve you answering questions regarding your experiences as a principal in a school with multi-grade classes. The interviews will take one hour to complete. I also request your permission to use a tape recorder during the interview to ensure that accurate information is collected and later transcribed for analysis.

I will ensure that anonymity and confidentiality are upheld at all times. Your name and your school’s name will remain confidential. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research without consequence. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations will be used in the research document. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for five years. There are no known or anticipated risks in this study.

It is my hope that your participation will provide long-term benefits to you as a school principal and also teachers in multi-grade teachers.

Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

.....

(Signature)

.....

(Date)

APPENDIX K

PRINCIPAL’S CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

I, _____, have read and fully understand the request letter to participate in the research on challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in primary schools in Nzhelele East Circuit.

I also understand that confidentiality and anonymity during the study will be maintained and that my participation is voluntary

I accept and give my consent to participate.

.....
(Signature)

.....
(Date)

APPENDIX L

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SECTION A : BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Gender (Indicate with an “x”)

	Male	Female
Participant A		
Participant B		
Participant C		
Participant D		

2. Age (in years)

	20- 29	30-39	40-49	50 and above
Participant A				
Participant B				
Participant C				
Participant D				

3. Position you Hold

Participant A	
Participant B	
Participant C	
Participant D	

4. Qualifications

	Professional	Academic
Participant A		
Participant B		
Participant C		
Participant D		

5. Teaching Experience

	Total Years in Teaching	Experience in Multi-Grade Teaching
Participant A		
Participant B		
Participant C		
Participant D		

6. Grades Combined

Participant A	
Participant B	
Participant C	
Participant D	

SECTION B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS OF MULTI-GRADE CLASSES

1. What is your understanding of the concept multi-grade teaching?
2. What motivated your school to introduce multi-grade teaching?
3. Can you briefly explain how you group your learners in your classrooms?
4. How do you plan your lessons?
5. Which teaching methods do you use in your classrooms?
6. Which learning materials do you use?
7. Can you please explain how you assess learners in your classrooms?
8. What challenges do you experience in the multi-grade teaching context?
9. Are you trained to teach multi-grade classrooms?
10. How often are you supported by curriculum advisors in multi-grade teaching?
11. How effective is multi-grade teaching in the education of learners?
12. What is your general feeling towards multi-grade teaching?
13. What do you think should be done to ensure the effectiveness of teaching and learning in your classes?

APPENDIX M

INDIVIDUAL TEACHERS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE TEACHER

1. Gender (Indicate with an "x")

Male	
Female	

2. Age in Years (Indicate with an "x")

20-29	
30-39	
40-49	
50+	

3. Position you Hold

--

4. Qualifications

Professional	
Academic	

5. Teaching Experience

Total years of teaching	
Multi-grade teaching	

6. Grades Combined

--

SECTION B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS OF MULTI-GRADE CLASSES

1. What is your understanding of the concept multi-grade teaching?
2. What motivated your school to introduce multi-grade teaching?
3. Can you briefly explain how you group your learners in your classrooms?
4. How do you plan your lessons?
5. Which teaching methods do you use in your classrooms?
6. Which learning materials do you use?
7. Can you please explain how you assess learners in your classrooms?
8. What challenges do you experience in the multi-grade teaching context?
9. Are you trained to teach multi-grade classrooms?
10. How often are you supported by curriculum advisors in multi-grade teaching?
11. How effective is multi-grade teaching in the education of learners?
12. What is your general feeling towards multi-grade teaching?
13. What do you think should be done to ensure the effectiveness of teaching and learning in your classes?

APPENDIX N

PRINCIPAL'S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE PRINCIPAL

1. Gender (Indicate with an "x")

Male	
Female	

2. Age in Years (Indicate with an "x")

20-29	
30-39	
40-49	
50+	

3. Qualifications

Professional	
Academic	

4. Experience

Total number of years in teaching	
Years as principal	

SECTION B: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE SCHOOL.

5. School Enrolment

6. Number of Teachers

7. Grades Offered

SECTION C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ON CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS OF MULTI-GRADE CLASSES

1. What are the reasons for introducing multi-grade classes?
2. How is the school management team organised?
3. Do you have heads of department in the school to help with curriculum management?
4. What kind of support do you provide to teachers in multi-grade classes?
5. What do you do to ensure that the curriculum is being fully implemented in multi-grade classes?
6. How well do learners in multi-grade classes perform in their studies?
7. What challenges do you experience as a principal in a school with multi-grade classes?
8. What do you think should be done to ensure effective teaching and learning in multi-grade classes?

APPENDIX O

LESSON OBSERVATION SHEET

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 School:

1.2 Grades combined:.....

1.3 Subject:

1.5 Date:

1.5 Duration of lesson:

2. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Number of learners per grade:

.....
.....

2.2 Sitting arrangement:

.....
.....

2.3 Availability of learning materials:

.....
.....

2.4 Grade of text books used.

.....
.....

3. CLASSROOM INTERACTION

3.1 The nature of the educator/learner interaction.

.....
.....

3.2 Is the teacher able to involve learners in both grades in the lesson?

.....
.....
3.3 Which teaching strategies does the educator use?

.....
.....
3.4 How are learners assessed?

.....
.....
3.5 Does the educator teach according to the lesson plan?

.....
.....
3.6 How is learner discipline maintained in the classroom?

APPENDIX P

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

15 April 2015

Ref#: 2015/03/18/30676991/33/MC
Student #: Mrs MS Mulaudzi
Student number#: 30676991

Dear Mrs Mulaudzi,

Decision: Approved

Researcher
Mrs Mulaudzi
P O Box 3727
Mkhado
0920
+27828239963
Mulaudzisandra1@gmail.com

Supervisor
Prof M Taole
Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies
+2712 429 3541
taolemj@unisa.ac.za

Proposal: Challenges experienced by teachers of multi-grade classes in primary schools at Nzhelele East circuit

Qualification: M Ed In Curriculum Studies

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for 2 years.

For full approval: The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the CEDU ERC on 15 April 2015.

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

*be communicated in writing to the College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.*

- 3) *The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.*

Note:

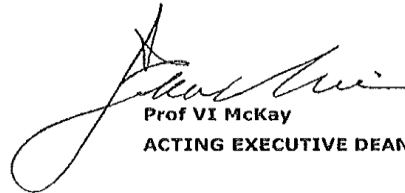
The reference number [top right corner of this communiqué] should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication [e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters] with the intended research participants, as well as with the College of Education RERC.

Kind regards,

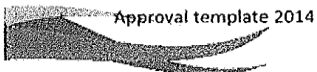


Dr M Claassens
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU ERC

mcdtc@netactive.co.za



Prof VI McKay
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN



University of South Africa
Pretter Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facs/mile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za