

Excerpts from UNESCO Sponsored MGML Report

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“Multigrade teaching is not a temporary measure. It is concerned with the policy of education for all and the cultural and scientific promotion of the whole nation - a long term task”

“Primary schools with the practice of multigrade teaching are to be the source to serve the suffering mankind, as the centers for causing social conscientization, economic amelioration and educational reform. In their development lies the realization of the universal right to education

”Birch and Lally (1995)

In 2008 the Teacher Education Division (TED) of Ghana Education Service embarked on an initiative aimed at addressing the rising needs of schools with Multigrade Multilevel (MGML) conditions in the country. As a result a manual was produced and training of District Teacher Support teams (DTSTs), selected heads and teachers was done. In addition the colleges of education, then referred to as training colleges, were all given manuals and training so that they could make it a part of the training of teacher trainees. This study, which is a collaborative effort between TED and OLE Ghana with support from UNESCO Cluster Office in Accra, was therefore to find out the status of the 2008 MGML initiative and determine the current situation MGML in the country. A field study was conducted in 10 colleges of education and 21 public schools in 8 districts and 4 regions where the 2008 initiative was carried out. A desk study was done on data gathered by EMIS as part of their annual school census as well as data from WAEC to determine current levels of MGML in the education system.

The study indicated that in 2008/09 32% of public schools had MGML situations. In 2009/10 it rose to 34% and in 2010/11 hit 40%. The study also indicates that for the 2010/2011 year 64% of teachers in schools with MGML conditions were untrained. Examining the data for the study revealed two main reasons why MGML situations do occur. Sampled data indicates that MGML may arise when a school's population is low and by GES standards cannot be given the full complement of teachers for the number of streams it has. An MGML situation may also arise when the population of the school is high, there are a certain number of streams but there are not enough teachers to go round all the streams and so teachers are forced to combine classes.

Principals and tutors interviewed in the 10 colleges of education agreed that the MGML initiative introduced in the colleges of education in 2008 was to expose would be teachers to effective strategies in handling/managing MGML classrooms. These strategies were to include developing teaching and learning materials which are specific for MGML teaching and creating an enabling and effective teaching and learning environment in a MGML classroom. The study however revealed that after conducting workshops on MGML and providing the tutors and the colleges with the MGML teaching manuals, MGML teaching was not mainstreamed into the teacher training course outline of the teacher trainees. It was therefore not examinable and as a result trainees were not taught or exposed to the methodology. They therefore had no knowledge of it. It was interesting to note that some colleges were not even aware that copies of the training manual had been sent to their colleges. However, the study revealed that about two credit hours is allocated to MGML training in the Untrained Teachers Diploma in Basic Education (UTDBE) Course.

The major findings of the study indicated that the 2008 MGML initiative covered specific sections of the country. A manual was produced as a key product of the initiative. However the manual was not widely distributed, in most cases it never reached the intended recipient and/or was not used as it should be.

A TOT approach was used. However majority of the TOTs never replicated the training they had received. This made the TOT model chosen for the 2008 MGML initiative not effective in realizing the envisaged goals. Many of the TOTs and those fortunate to be trained have retired, been transferred or left the classroom.

Monitoring of the initiative was weak and very little or no support was given to those trained to implement the new skills in the classrooms

Colleges of education, were introduced to MGML, had staff trained and given manuals. However the program never saw the light of day in the colleges because it was not part of their examinable curriculum.

Currently there are many schools (P1 – P6) that have MGML conditions. The number keeps on increasing year after year reaching 40% in the 2010/2011 academic year.

MGML situations arise because of low enrollment resulting in a low staff establishment quota or high enrollment with corresponding fewer teachers

There are quite a number of the MGML schools that have less than 3 teachers. However the distances between these schools and the nearest school make it prudent to keep them opened.

Majority of the teachers in these MGML schools have not received any formal training as teachers

Teacher preparation and professional development trainees at the colleges of education are taken through a wide range of subjects meant to prepare them for their work as teachers. However majority of trainees are calling for a training that will help rebrand and positively identify them as a new kind of teacher, ready to teach in any kind of school be it monograde or multigrade.

A wide range of recommendations can be made based on the study findings. These range from providing incentives of different kinds to teachers, retraining MGML TOTs, taking steps to bring MGML training as close as possible to intended beneficiaries, educational authorities making funds available for such training, and a better coordination of teacher preparation initiatives among TED, the Institute of Education and the colleges of education.

What the Ghana National Education Assessment 2011 Findings Report says on MGML

Multigrade classrooms were found to be associated with poor learning outcomes in nearly all grades and subjects taught. Only 3.5% of P6 students in schools with multigrade classrooms were found to reach proficiency in math, and roughly two-thirds of these students did not even reach minimum competency.

Teaching in multigrade classrooms presents particular challenges as the teachers must prepare multiple lessons to be able to teach students learning at different grade level. Teachers must also be able to organize the day in such a way that each of the grades are given sufficient instructional time. Teachers do not seem to be well prepared for multigrade teaching. Twenty-three percent of schools with at least one multigrade classroom had no trained teachers, versus 6% in the schools with no multigrade classes. Moreover, the data showed that multigrade schools were not benefiting from more circuit supervisory visits or in-service training than non-multigrade schools.

Schools that must maintain multigrade classrooms should receive **specific pedagogical supervision and in-service training** to help teachers overcome the challenges associated with teaching in multigrade-classroom settings



However the following are some key recommendations made by OLE Ghana and TED based both on the study findings as well as best practices elsewhere.

For schools that consistently attract low enrollment and cannot be shut down because of the distance between them and the next school, it is recommended that tried and tested MGML initiatives be studied, adapted and piloted as a means of addressing the situation.

The entire process should be carefully documented, filmed

and made into training/set up materials for schools currently with similar conditions or schools who may be set up in the future with such conditions. Those who take part in the pilot could become national facilitators to support a possible national roll out. OLE Ghana will be prepared to work with TED to provide UNESCO and other identified partners with a proposal on this.

The existing MGML manual has to be revised into a self tutoring and practical based course, complete with videos of best practices regarding teaching in an MGML situation. This could be put on CDs, and/or on various national education websites. It should be for free. DTSTs, TOTs, NGOs, Heads of schools, Teachers, etc should easily access it for training or self guidance purposes.

OLE Ghana will be prepared to work with TED to provide UNESCO and other partners with a proposal. The production of such an MGML course could well mark the beginning of the mounting of similar self-tutored professional courses on different aspects of teaching and learning for teachers to access for free.

There is the need to take a critical look at the course structure of the colleges of education, content of the course, duration and facilities with the view to finding out if they currently meet our national aspirations. Such a study could inform a national debate on innovative ways of preparing teachers to meet our national aspirations. OLE Ghana would be prepared to undertake such a study with TED/NCTE and other relevant bodies if so desired.

Aspects of the colleges of education curriculum should be dedicated to the practical teaching of methodologies such as MGML where simulations of real classroom situations in Ghana are created and these methodologies applied.

Work on the teacher preparation and continuous professional development policy needs to be fast tracked. It must take into account steps which will rebrand the Ghanaian teacher, address the unfortunate disconnect between training, ultimate teacher formation and the capabilities of the trained teachers to confidently face the real challenges on the ground. The policy must as well as place a high premium on in-service training making it count towards professional development with its attendant financial rewards.