

Full Length Research Paper

Pedagogical practices: the case of multi-class teaching in Fiji primary school

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Multi-class teaching is a common phenomenon in small schools not only in Fiji, but also in many countries. The aim of the present study was to determine the teaching styles adopted by teachers in the context of multi-class teaching. A qualitative case study research design was adopted. This included a school with multi-class teaching as the norm. Data for the study was gathered by means of non-participant observation and interviews from the population of teachers in the case study school. A purposive sampling technique was employed for the purpose of the study. Analysis of the feedback obtained show that the teachers in the case study school generally carried out the teaching/learning process using transmissive approaches. A number of factors have influenced these teachers to take this position, such as lack of professional preparation and limited resources for teaching and learning. The findings have implications for the delivery of basic education in rural schools where multi-class teaching is the norm and it is suggested that some in-depth training is needed to equip future teachers to cope with multi-class teaching.

Key words: multi-class, basic education, pedagogical practices, rural education, Fiji.

INTRODUCTION

Successful teaching practices by the teachers can make a difference in children's learning outcomes in all teaching contexts (for example, Hargreaves and Ho, 2000; Thomas 1975; Connell, 1974). Aside from mastery of the contents of the subjects, teachers need to effectively plan and employ a wide range of teaching strategies appropriate to children's characteristics as well in a variety of classroom settings. Effective and challenging classroom practices could also ensure quality education for children (Chandra, 2004). For this to happen, Chandra (2004) emphasized the need for ongoing professional development of teachers to enable them to be at the forefront not only on pedagogical techniques but also on school curriculum and communications technologies. The implementation of suitable pedagogical techniques such as individualized learning programmes, peer tutoring, independent study and small group teaching will help children find learning meaningful and in turn they will profit from schooling in any teaching circumstance.

However, in some teaching arrangements at the primary school level, teachers appear to use instructional strategies which can adversely affect children's learning outcomes. It is useful therefore, to explore the teaching strategies used by teachers in such situations. For ins-

tance, in the Fiji context, a significant number of primary school teachers are faced with situations where they are assigned to teach two or more classes in one classroom. This type of organization of classes is referred to as multi-class teaching (Collingwood, 1991). This appears to be a difficult teaching circumstance for many primary teachers not only in Fiji but also in many other countries (Learning Together, 2000). Multi-class teaching is a common phenomenon in small primary schools located in rural and remote areas in Fiji. Statistics show that in the local context about 50% of the teachers and 28% of the nation's children are engaged in multi-class teaching (Collingwood, 1991). The statistics indicate a wide prevalence of multi-class teaching in the Fiji's primary education system and research on pedagogical practices is warranted.

BACKGROUND

Little (2001) suggests that "For children to learn effectively in multi-grade environment, teachers need to be well-trained and supported, well-resourced and hold positive attitudes to multi-grade teaching". If teachers are not adequately prepared to teach in multi-class environments

it is likely that they will adversely affect the education of their students (UNESCO, 1989). The UNESCO report also indicated that teachers who are not professionally prepared for multi-class contexts may lack time and organizational management capabilities. Pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes need to prepare teachers to use a variety of teaching strategies, particularly those identified as effective for multi-class teaching such as cooperative learning and discussion (Miller, 1991). Teaching in multi-class settings could be as effective as in single grade schools, provided there is an abundance of educational resource materials and well prepared teachers who could utilize them (Thomas and Shaw, 1992).

In some educational contexts, multi-class teaching is seen in a positive way as lending itself to successful classroom practices, such as the use of peer tutoring and small group teaching (Learning Together, 2000). In order to effectively cope with teaching in such circumstances, the use of a more flexible approach to teaching and learning is desirable (Little, 1995). This suggests that a transmissive approach such as the traditional 'chalk-and-talk' is not a suitable teaching option to adopt by teachers in multi-class contexts. However, the use of a flexible approach or any other creative approaches would solely depend on the quality of teachers posted to multi-class schools. The quality of teachers in turn depends on their professional preparation. Both theoretical and practical preparation for multi-class teaching will enable teachers to use appropriate pedagogical skills to enhance classroom work. Theoretical preparation could encapsulate areas such as organizing the classroom environment, teaching with small groups, peer teaching, creating stand-by activities and using community support. After laying a strong theoretical base, trainees should be given practical experience of multi-class teaching. Teachers posted to such schools will then have a range of options to effectively carry out the demands of work with creativity and in professionally stimulating and satisfying ways.

The University of New England (UNE) and the Government of Bhutan have successfully worked in partnership whereby Bhutanese teachers go to UNE for training in multi-grade teaching (Ninnes, 2006). This training is important, despite the contextual differences between the two countries as the training will equip these teachers with relevant knowledge and skills in effectively carrying out multi-grade teaching. As pointed out by Ninnes, the professional development programme has improved multi-grade teaching practices of these teachers.

To date no research has been carried out in the Fiji context which specifically focuses on pedagogical techniques used by teachers to carry out the teaching and learning process. It is important, then, to research the instructional strategies used by teachers in schools with multi-class arrangements. Looking at the statistics on multi-class teaching provided by Collingwood (1991) for Fiji, the need for local research is therefore obvious.

Purpose of the research

The aim of this study was to explore pedagogical practices used by teachers in a primary school where multi-class teaching is the norm. Specifically, the research was designed to examine the strategies used by teachers in multi-class teaching, the kind of training both pre-service and in-service that was provided, and the degree to which methods of teaching suggested in the Multi-class teaching in primary schools: A handbook for teachers in the Pacific by Collingwood (1991) are being used by the teachers of the study school. This handbook grew out in response to maximize the impact of teaching options on the Pacific primary school children especially those children who are in schools with multi-class teaching arrangements. Thus the handbook is a useful guide for a well-run multi-class and was supposed to be made available to all primary school teachers handling multi-class teaching. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- (i) What teaching strategies are being employed in the selected school with multi-class teaching?
- (ii) What kind of training, both pre-service and in-service was provided to teachers to prepare them for multi-class teaching in the chosen school?
- (iii) To what extent are the student centred methods of teaching such as group work and peer teaching suggested in the Multi-class teaching in primary schools: A handbook for teachers in the Pacific by Collingwood (1991) being used by the teachers in the study school?

Rationale

In other contexts such as in Australia there is an abundance of research literature on various issues relating to multi-grade teaching. Here in the Fiji context, there has not been any in-depth research conducted on the theme of multi-grade teaching. Only a small-scale study was specifically carried out by a team of researchers on the theme of multi-grade teaching using the rubrics of action-research (Singh, 1996). Another study cited is by Lingam (1996) which indirectly touched on the issue whilst studying about teacher supply and demand for Fiji primary schools. As such there is a paucity of local research literature available and this study could help contribute to the accumulation of knowledge in the area of multi-class teaching. The present study of multi-class teaching could provide insights about teaching and learning practices in schools with multi-class teaching arrangements. The answers obtained to the research questions posed would help remind different stakeholders about their role in providing quality education to school age children in all environments. For teacher educators responsible for the in-service education of primary teachers, the findings would help inform their professional practice, in terms of equipping future teachers with suitable pedagogical techniques

to cope with teaching and learning in a range of classroom environments. The findings of the present study could also inform the principal stakeholder on issues relating to the design of the school curriculum, both pre-service and in-service teacher preparation, and educational resource materials to ensure provision of quality education to the nation's children and in particular those children in schools where multi-class teaching is the common practice.

In addition, the study could act as a catalyst for further research on varying issues pertaining to multi-class teaching in Fiji as well as in other neighbouring countries in the Pacific region and beyond.

Definition of key terms

Some of the common terms used are explained to help readers have a better understanding of their usage in the context of this study

Pedagogical Practices: This refers to the procedures adopted for the delivery of the content of the various subjects in the school curriculum. The term is also used interchangeably with teaching techniques, methods of teaching, and instructional strategies.

Multi-class: It is a situation where two or more year-groups are provided instruction in one classroom by a teacher. In some contexts the term multi-grade is used instead of multi-class. Cornish (2006) highlight the lack of widely agreed definition of the term and she goes on to suggest the need to know contextual details when reading about the subject. Since the definition is quite comprehensive, this study will adopt the usage of the term as defined by Collingwood.

Multi-class teaching: Collingwood (1991) defines multi-class teaching as "the situation, you, the teacher, face when you are responsible for [teaching] two or more-year groups in your primary school classroom".

Straight-class teaching: It refers to a situation where the teacher handles the teaching and learning process of just a single Year group in a classroom.

Delimitation

The result of this study will be limited to the Western Education Division of the Republic of Fiji Islands. In the future, after further research endeavours on the subject of multi-class teaching, it may be possible to generalise the findings to other similar educational contexts within Fiji, as well as to other countries such as those in small Pacific Island States where multi-class teaching is the norm.

METHODOLOGY

On the basis of the research questions posed, a qualitative case study design was employed. A case study is an "empirical inquiry

that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1984). In the present study the phenomenon refers to the teaching strategies employed by teachers in a school where multi-class teaching is the norm. The case chosen for the study is a school with multi-class teaching arrangement. Gaining access to a site and establishing rapport with the participants are essential steps for an investigator to obtain relevant data to answer the research questions posed for the study (Creswell, 1995). In view of this, the study was based on a primary school chosen from the Western Education Division of Fiji. Having worked in the educational context, that is, in the Western Division, for ten years, the researcher felt comfortable and confident of gaining easy access to the site as well as to the participants therein in order to obtain relevant data for the study. Thus the site chosen did not present any difficulties in data collection activities. The school was reasonably suited to the problem under investigation because it was typical of a school where multi-class teaching is undertaken. A purposive sampling technique was used and as such all the teachers in the school were included in the study.

The study consisted of qualitative data gathering methods, including interviews and detailed observations of lessons. This was based on what Burns (1998) suggested "...what people actually do and say be compared with their account of what they did and saidtwo methods of collecting data must be employed in such inquiries-observation and interviewing". The nature of the present study required the investigator to observe the teaching-learning process to gather relevant data. In addition, interviews were conducted with the view that most things in the classroom context cannot be entirely apparent during observation (Wiersma, 1986). Interviews with classroom teachers provided greater detail of the events and activities in the classroom, that is, the instructional techniques employed by the teachers. Thus the information from the interviews helped complement data that were obtained from the observations. Details of these methods are provided below.

Observation

Lesson observations were carried out. This helped to identify the pedagogical practices used by teachers in their respective teaching in a multi-class situation. Observations also helped to determine whether teachers use other aspects of teaching multi-class such as group work and appropriate teaching aids to enhance the teaching and learning process. A total of eight lessons were observed and analysed. The observation consisted of the following checklists:

- (i) Does the lesson begin with a demonstration or an explanation that will appeal to or motivate students of different levels of learning?
- (ii) Are the children working in groups? If so how are the groups formed?
- (iii) What explicit instructions are given by the teacher to each group in a multi-class situation?
- (iv) What activities are used to round off the lesson in the multi-class situation?
- (v) How much of the time did the teacher spend talking and how much time was spend on activities?
- (vi) What appropriate teaching-learning aids were developed and used by the teacher?
- (vii) What other resources are available in the classroom for multi-class teaching-learning?

Interview

A semi-structured interview schedule was created to elicit relevant information associated with multi-class teaching in the study school. The interviews were conducted with all the teachers of the study

school on an individual basis. The interviews were recorded with the permission of each teacher. The following are the interview questions:

- (i). How many years of teaching experience do you have?
- (ii) How many of these years have you spent teaching multi-class?
- (iii). At what institution did you undertake your teacher preparation programme?
- (iv) What components on multi-class teaching did the pre-service program you complete include?
- (v) How did you initially find teaching in a multi-class situation?
- (vi). What teaching strategies do you employ in teaching a multi-class?
- (vii) What are the other teaching strategies you consider useful in a multi-class situation?
- (viii). Why do you think these are useful?
- (ix). What are some of the challenges you face as a teacher handling multi-classes?
- (x). Do you have a copy of the publication 'Multi-class teaching in primary schools: A handbook for teachers in the Pacific'?
- (xi). What aspects of this publication do you find useful in handling multi-class teaching?
- (xii). Have you attended any in-service program dealing with multi-class teaching?
- (xiii). What did these courses emphasise?
- (xiv). Are there any suggestions you would like to make that are related to multi-class teaching?

Data analysis

As the study involved a qualitative approach, descriptive statistics were considered adequate and appropriate. The observation records were comprehensive. Since there was a small number of teachers interviewed, the analysis of the data was carried out using 'low-tech' method, that is, analysis was carried out manually (Vulliamy and Webb, 1992). A form of 'analytic induction' was used to analyse the qualitative data collected by means of observation and interviews (Burns, 1998). This involved scanning the data and assigning meaningful labels to them on the basis of the objectives of the study. Also relevant quotes from the interviews were presented on the basis of Rudduck's (1993) suggestion that "some statements carry a remarkably rich density of meaning in a few words". This was done to support the findings that emerged from the analysis of the data.

Ethical considerations

The informed consent of the relevant authorities such as the Ministry of Education, head teacher of the study school and classroom teachers of the study school were sought before the fieldwork was undertaken. Also, ethical clearance was granted by the Research Committee of the School of Education at the University of the South Pacific.

The data collected were analysed and reported in such a way as to further protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and the study school. Anonymity of the participants as well as the name of the study school is ensured in this research report. To maintain confidentiality, presentation of data used the following codes: the study school is labelled School A and teachers of the study school are denoted T1 and T2, etc.

RESULTS

The findings are presented under the headings: Observation and Interview Data. A brief background of the study school prefaces the findings.

Background of the case study school (CSS)

The case study school is located about 1.5 kilometers off the Queens Highway. It can be reached by traveling a dusty gravel road. The school is located on an elevated five acre site which is leased to the school as Native Land. It is pleasantly located. The school overlooks the sea and has a magnificent view of the Yasawa/Mamanuca group of islands.

This school was established in the late 1940s. Like many other schools, this school also had a very humble beginning. Prior to its establishment, children had to travel some distance to attend school. The neighbouring school, however, did not cater for the teaching of South Indian languages and culture. To cater for this need, evening classes were conducted in the area at people's residences. Since the area was predominantly occupied by the South Indians, the founders of the school felt that the best way forward was to set up a school in order to preserve the South Indian languages and culture. When the school officially opened its doors, the number of children enrolled was 44, 30 boys and 14 girls. These children were taught in a one-room building made of tin and timber. The school was established some 50 years ago. At present, the school has five classrooms, an office, a reasonable sized playground and two concrete staff quarters. The school is run by a non-government organization, that is, the Then India Sanmarga Ikyā Sangam, which is a religious organization.

The school is a small one with four teachers, including the head teacher and 110 children, who were taught in four groups as follows: classes 1 and 2; classes 3 and 4; classes 5 and 6; and classes 7 and 8.

Interview data

The teaching staff at the case study school consisted of two married Indo-Fijian couples. These teachers were graduates from the government-run primary teacher education institution, namely, the Lautoka Teachers' College. Here these teachers completed a two-year pre-service programme and were awarded a Certificate in Primary Teaching (CPT). In terms of their teaching experience, two teachers began their teaching career at this school and as a result these two teachers had up to 13 years of experience in multi-class teaching. The remaining two teachers had five years' teaching experience. Both of them had taught in schools with straight classes before being posted to the case study school. One of them had four years' experience in multi-class teaching and the other had three years. Table 1 shows the information relating to the educational background of the teachers.

The teachers reported that they did not receive any form of professional preparation for multi-class teaching in their pre-service training programme. They found multi-class teaching difficult, as the following comments show: It was very difficult for me. I was not able to cope with teaching of lessons. I had to take advice from the other

Table1. Educational background of the teachers.

Teacher	Qualification	Length of Teaching experience (Years)	Multi-class teaching Experience(Years)
T1	CPT	13	13
T2	CPT	13	13
T2	CPT	5	4
T4	CPT	5	3

Source: Data collated from case study school, 2004

staff members...The preparation [for lessons] took a lot of time (T4, 2004).

For me handling a multi-class is not easy, especially when my Class 6 is to do an external examination. I have to see that all the requirements are completed before the students sit for the Fiji Intermediate Examination. When I teach Class 6, then my Class 5 is neglected (T2, 2004).

I have to teach Classes 3 and 4. Each class has a prescribed syllabus to teach and I find this unmanageable (T3, 2004).

When I have to attend to administrative matters of the school both the classes are affected. We do not any extra teacher to help us (T1, 2004).

With regard to teaching strategies, teachers at the case study school reported that 'chalk and talk' was the most common strategy used. When asked about the teaching strategies they consider useful to bring about optimum learning outcomes, they indicated group work and field trips. For instance:

[These strategies] provide first hand experience, making learning more effective, enjoyable and interesting (T3, 2004).

The methods help children to learn better. They can try things by themselves. Children get more experience this way. Learning becomes meaningful as well as enjoyable (T4, 2004).

They also reported during the interview that they found it difficult to employ these strategies due to the lack of resource materials for teaching-learning. One of the teachers mentioned that taking students for field trips is not easy because of the Occupational Health Safety (OHS) regulations. For example:

Field trips, excursions are useful but I am scared of the OHS (T2, 2004).

When asked about the challenges they faced as multi-class teachers, the following were identified as the most common ones: heavy workload; lack of resources; time constraint; the curriculum design unsuitable for a multi-class teaching; and examination pressure.

Teachers at the case study school also offered suggestions on how to improve the situation. These were their suggestions: pre-service and in-service training of teachers on multi-class teaching; availability of appropriate and sufficient resources; design curriculum for multi-class; provision of incentives and support to multi-class teachers; and relieve the head teacher of school with multi-class from classroom teaching. As commented by a teacher:

The head teacher to be relieved of all classroom duties. He should be a full-time administrator and can relieve other teachers in their absence...How can the head teacher assess or monitor other teachers if he is a full-time classroom teacher (T1, 2004).

Observation data

Lesson observation was carried out to determine the teaching approaches used by the teachers. The results are presented in Table 2. The letter 'x' represents teacher teaching such as providing explanations, demonstration, direct teaching etc. and the symbol '/' shows children doing individual work assigned by the teacher.

For the eight lessons observed, almost 70% of the teaching process began with teacher talking such as by providing explanations relating to the topic for the lesson. In the remaining lessons (30%) talking began with question/answer sessions, revision or story telling by the teacher. The lessons were dominated by the teachers. To round off the lessons, activities from the curriculum materials were given for homework. Teaching was carried out in accordance with the prescription supplied by the Curriculum Advisory Section of the Ministry of Education. The teachers taught the classes separately.

The students sitting for external examinations received more attention than the others in the multi-class. However, generally the children participated well in the lessons.

DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the data showed that 'chalk and talk', an example of a teacher-centered approach, was the most common instructional strategy employed by the teachers

Table 2. Teaching approach /Instructional time.

Subject	Class	First 10 mins	Second 10 mins	Third 10 mins
Maths	1	xxxxx/////////xxxxxx	/////////xxxxxx/////////x	x/////////xx/////////
Maths	2	/////////xxxxx/////////	xxxxx/////////xxxxx	/xxxxxx/////////xxxxx
Social Science	3	xxxx/////////xxxxxx	/////////xxxxxx/////////	//xxxxxx/////////
Social Science	4	/////////xxxxx/////////	xxxxxx/////////xx	xx/////////xxxxxx
Health	5	xxx/////////	/////////	xxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Health	6	////xxxxxx	xxxxxxxxxxxxxx	/////////
Maths	7	/////////xxx	xxx/////////	/////////xxx
Maths	8	xxxxxxxxxxxxx////	/////////xxxxxxxxxx	xxxxxxxxx/////////

in the case study school. This approach does not promote active learning in the children. The teachers did not demonstrate any creative pedagogies in carrying out the teaching and learning process which is recommended for multi-class teaching context (Little, 1995; Miller, 1991). They did not use collaborative grouping strategies and peer tutoring, even though children were seated in pairs. These approaches are suitable for multi-class teaching (Collingwood, 1991). The class teaching approach was dominant and the teachers spent most of the time talking, that is, providing explanations and the children seated and listened passively. Towards the end of the lesson, the children were given activities to do while the teacher moved to the other class to teach. Since the children were seated in pairs small group activities would have made a difference in children's learning. Teaching was carried out for the two classes separately. This approach to teaching reduces teachers' contact and instructional time with the students (Table 2). In fact the teachers were aware of benefits of using group work but they hardly used this approach. Maybe the use of fixed curriculum for each class level complicated the work of these multi-class teachers.

Also, the analysis showed that the teachers in the case study school did not receive any form of professional preparation for multi-class teaching. During their pre-service training neither the theoretical nor the practical component of the programme included aspects related to multi-class teaching. This finding is consistent with Veenman's (1995) findings in studies of multi-class teaching in other educational contexts. From this, it becomes abundantly clear that the teachers in the case study school were prepared for straight class teaching as in other school systems. Teachers prepared for straight class teaching are likely to find it extremely difficult to operate effectively in a multi-class environment. The pre-service teacher education programme which the teachers of the case study completed did not provide a knowledge base to enable them to have a thorough understanding of how to organize teaching and learning in schools where multi-class teaching is the norm. Consequently, the teachers could not use many suitable instructional arrangements. Professional preparation for multi-class teaching with adequate emphasis on both theory and practice would have

made a difference in terms of pedagogical practices of multi-class teachers (Ninnes, 2006).

Despite the number of years' of teaching experience of the teachers in the case study school, the feedback obtained from the interviews with them indicated that they still lack the professional preparedness in multi-class teaching and a general endorsement about the difficulties of multi-class teaching. The observation data on classroom practice also showed that the teachers carried out multi-class teaching in the same manner as straight class teaching or mainstream class teaching. The finding here is consistent with what is demonstrated in the literature, that is, teachers find multi-class teaching difficult due to the lack of professional preparation (Learning Together, 2000; Veenman, 1995; Mason and Burn, 1995).

The Multi-class teaching in primary schools: A handbook for teachers in the Pacific by Collingwood (1991) would have provided essential tips to these teachers not only on the use of a suitable pedagogy such as peer tutoring and group work but also on various other aspects of multi-class teaching. The book is a practical guide and it covers a range of topics associated with multi-class teaching. It includes chapters on multi-class teaching, year group combinations, organizing classrooms, planning work, setting up routines, and teaching with groups, peer teaching and making use of outside help. In addition, it includes a discussion on creating lively learning activities and describes 'stand-by activities'. The use of this publication would have helped them to address some of their concerns relating to teaching strategies. Unfortunately, the handbook was not available at the case study school. Also, the school had limited educational resource materials for teaching and learning. This further constrained the teachers in their work and this may have contributed to the use of direct teaching approach. Copies of the prescription and textbooks were old and even some pages of the textbooks were missing. The teachers prepared some teaching aids, but on the whole these were fairly old. Also, the teachers pointed out that they had bought some of the materials themselves. Literature demonstrates that multi-class schools need a lot of resource materials to enhance the work of teachers such as independent study and group work (Thomas and Shaw, 1992). Such schools need to be provided with curriculum-based learning kits

which could facilitate independent study and group work. Based on the evidence gathered, the teachers in the case study school resorted to pedagogical practices which were more teacher centred than child centred. Such pedagogical practices demonstrated by the teachers in the case study school could be described as unresponsive to the multi-class teaching context.

Conclusions

The study has explored the pedagogical practices of teachers in a case study school with multi-class teaching arrangement. As mentioned earlier, the instructional strategies adopted were educationally unsound. The use of teacher-dominated pedagogy which the literature demonstrates as ineffective was the norm in the case study school. To succeed in providing good quality primary education, it is crucial for teachers to carry out their teaching responsibilities effectively in whatever context they are assigned to teach. For this to happen, teachers need to be well prepared to ensure that they are able to cope with the challenges and complexities of work in the field such as in schools with multi-class teaching arrangements. Otherwise, like the teachers in the case study school, other teachers may continue to experience anxieties and difficulties in carrying out multi-class teaching. The initial primary teacher training programme should equip prospective teachers with appropriate pedagogical skills to cope with teaching in multi-class teaching context. The posting of well prepared teachers, that is, those with relevant training such as in pedagogy is vital in order to improve the process of teaching and learning in primary schools where multi-class teaching is the norm.

In this regard, the government owned and run teacher training college, namely, Lautoka Teachers' College has recently taken a positive step by including a course on multi-class teaching in its new Diploma of Primary Teaching programme, which came into effect in 2005. It is envisaged that this preparatory course will help facilitate the work of future teachers in multi-class settings by training them to develop appropriate instructional practices, such as peer learning, group learning and even self-study. The initiative taken by the college demonstrates that the preparation of teachers for multi-class teaching is vital to ensure effective teaching and learning to take place. Now that a preparatory course on multi-class teaching is included in the pre-service training programme, further research could be conducted relating to its effectiveness in meeting the demands of multi-class teaching and then on the basis of the findings appropriate changes could be introduced to strengthen the preparatory course.

Apart from the preparatory course, structured in-service training programmes could be conducted focusing on various aspects associated with multi-class teaching such as pedagogic approaches to better learning, and classroom organization. Since multi-class teaching situation is going to remain part of the schooling structure in many

countries as a way to achieve universal primary education, it is vital that the process of teaching and learning employed in such contexts serve the children well. Consequently, there is a need for a more focused approach to research in this area of multi-class teaching not only in Fiji but also beyond. At present, approaches to research on multi-class teaching generally appears to be characterized by 'one shot' small-scale studies and this is not sufficient to inform and influence policy and practice.

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