

Primary Education to Out-of-School Children

Multi-Grade Teaching Learning: The DAM approach

The Context

The children who remain out of school are either dropped out from the school or have never been to school. Particularly those who dropped out discontinued education at different levels of primary education. When they are back to a programme, they are obviously at various levels of learning. An essential requirement to facilitate their learning is to re-start from the point of existing learning.

All development planners emphasize on sustained access of children to primary education with equity. The progress made on achievement of EFA and MDG goal relating to primary education in many countries apparently is encouraging but still the rate of drop out is very high. In Bangladesh, for example, at the primary school level more than one-third of enrolled children are dropped out before they complete the 5-year primary education cycle. In the post-2015 discourses as well the stress remain on the agenda that children from the poor segments of the society and especially the girls should get priority; because of the fact that in all cases the drop-out rate is high among girls. The reasons for children's high dropout and remaining out of school are poor quality of education, poverty, social barriers, insecurity, early marriage, distance of educational facilities and many more. Creating an enabling environment in the school and making institutional facilities available at all corners of the country is still a big challenge. It is not only an infrastructure problem but also the lack of adequate human resources who could make the schools joyful for the children.

The Response

In a context where the out of school children or drop out pupils cannot attend the formal schools because of its structured system and which in many cases are not suitable for the poor pupils to adjust, DAM's Multi-Grade Teaching Learning (MGTL) approach offers an answer to access, **re-start learning from the existing level** and retain them in education. MGTL class offers flexible class environment to school-age children, who could not enroll in school or dropped out early for a wide variety of complex and often interlinked reasons.

- MGTL facilitates children to learn, graduate and see their right to education fulfilled.
- MGTL facilitates resuming learning by the dropout children from the level they stopped education in formal schools.
- MGTL ensures accessibility, relevance, inclusiveness and affordability.
- MGTL address the multiple traits of learners, such as their interests, needs, experience, abilities, culture and learning styles, which is crucial to bring education within reach of marginalized children
- MGTL offers implementation of more flexible, alternative and equity based learning at primary education level as an alternate approach.

DAM's MGTL in practice: UNIQUE project as a case

UNIQUE Project of Dhaka Ahsania Mission being implemented with the support of the European Commission is among many other non-formal primary education initiatives in Bangladesh through which DAM MGTL is developed, tested and proved its effectiveness. The UNIQUE project started in 2007 and reached 159,000 drop out and out of school children and brought them back to the world of education.

Some quotes from the Evaluation report of UNIQUE project:

"Multi-grade teaching-learning system is one of the important features of UNIQUE NFPE model. While the system itself flexible, it is also one of the indicators of flexibility of the UNIQUE NFPE programme."

"The most notable feature of (this) NFPE programme, known to be multi-grade teaching-learning system with one teacher responsible for teaching learners of different grades in different subjects in one class divided into groups, is found to be an economic and reasonably effective arrangement."

"The system allows movement of learners from lower grade to higher grade according to the competencies achieved without having any time bar. The flexible movement has resulted in varying time required by learners in different subjects for their grade advancement."

DAM Multi-Grade Teaching Learning: Process Description

MGTL approach is used to describe the teaching in primary education of children from a number of grades usually in one class. In Multi-Grade Teaching, a teacher teaches more than one class/grade at the same time in the same classroom. For a significant part of the time in the classroom, primary level students learn in four groups, differentiated according to level of subject knowledge and ability. The same student can be in an “advanced” group say, in Bangla, but in “basic” group, say, for mathematics-according to her/his existing educational attainment level.’

The pupils are assessed at the time of the admission to identify their individual competencies by subject and can have option to learn in different grade’s subject according to their rating in individual subjects. Therefore, a pupil may learn Bangla of grade 3, English of grade 2, Math’s of grade 1 and so on so forth. During the learning time, the pupils move from one grade to another (subject-wise) passing through continuous assessment.

A tutor follows an academic plan and maintains a lesson plan accordingly everyday to facilitate the class. Although there is a group leader in each group (table) who facilitates learning of other pupils in the same group; senior grade pupils sometimes help a tutor to follow up lower grade pupils. In addition to monthly assessment, a quarterly assessment of the academic progress is also done and pupils can move to upper grade or mainstream to formal schools.

- ✓ Learning is facilitated according to the individual competencies of the children
- ✓ Small learning cohort formed, based on subject to learn have more opportunity to interact with a teacher and among themselves
- ✓ Community based children learning centers provide flexible time space for the pupils to attend the class
- ✓ Periodic assessment process can help the progress of individual learners and the advanced pupils can move to upper level
- ✓ The fast learner moves faster towards the upper grades and can graduate earlier than others
- ✓ The competent children are eligible to appear in formal /public primary education examinations.

MGTL Classroom Management

An MGTL centre has 25-30 pupils. The pupils are divided into four grades: Beginner (*Praromvik*), Advanced (*Aragami*), Skilled (*Dakkhya*) and Independent (*Sadhin*). This represents class 1 to 4/5 in the formal primary schools. In each session (whatever the subject), pupils sit in four groups with small work table. A tutor gives lesson instruction and follows up the progress.

Apart from peer learning, group task, project works, use of mobile board, extra curricula works, social learning, use of supplementary reading materials etc. are followed depending on the subjectwise requirement. The approach has its flexibility- so Tutors can choose how to manage the class room. Same class room can be used for different purpose simply by removing the work tables.

- A Multi-grade class has four work tables (use as work station).
- The national primary education curriculum is followed
- Formal education books are used as core learning materials
- Supplementary materials and workbooks are used to reinforce learning process
- Locally available and developed indigenous materials are used for learning
- Class room is decorated by children with pictures, photos, charts, for gallery learning
- Each class room has two writing boards, one fixed (big) and the other is mobile (small).The mobile board can be moved in any location of the class room as per needs
- The pupils, besides, their daily learning, participate in the individual and group performances.

DAM Multi-Grade Approach: A value addition to traditional Primary Education:

The flexible modes of Multi-Grade Teaching Learning Approach requires limited but active learning time and thus facilitate pupils to acquire their competencies of primary level within a short span of period (less than five years). It creates an enabling learning environment making the learning joyful for the pupils. As individual competencies is valued, pupils those who are fast learners can complete the cycle of primary education in less time and can be mainstreamed into higher (secondary level) level. Flexible assessment helps to graduate earlier and make room to new pupils to enroll any time of the year in oppose to waiting for the beginning of the academic year.