

Against All Odds: How Do Primary Teachers Navigate in Multi-grade Teaching Contexts?

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KEYWORDS Assessment. Lesson Planning. Teaching Strategies. Conceptualisation. Training. Support

ABSTRACT Multi-grade teaching is seen as an important policy option for providing access to education for learners in remote areas. However, achieving excellence in teaching and learning in a rural context remains a challenge for teachers and other sectors in a changing education system. The study describes the lived experiences of multi-grade teachers in rural schools and how they survive in their different multi-grade contexts. The research design was qualitative in nature, using case studies. Data were collected using observations and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that teachers have varying perceptions of multi-grade teaching and do not have a clear understanding of the rationale behind multi-grade teaching. In addition, the findings from the data reflect that despite the challenges multi-grade teachers face they are able to find ways of using the little they have to enable teaching and learning to take place in their context. Multi-grade teachers practise useful strategies such as choosing similar topics and assessing learners in the same classroom according to their different grade levels. The study recommends that the teacher training curriculum integrates multi-grade teaching strategies as part of the initial teacher training, to enable teachers to deal with the realities that they face in multi-grade schools. In addition a well-coordinated support system at national, provincial, district and school level could help teachers cope with difficulties in their multi-grade classrooms.