Using Multi-grade Teaching Learning Approach
Exploring Its Practices and Opportunities in Bangladesh For Hard-to-reach Children

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Using Multi-Grade Teaching Learning Approach: Exploring its Practices and Opportunities in Bangladesh for Hard-to-Reach Children

By

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Foreword

Multi-grade Teaching Learning Approach (MTLA) is relatively a new approach in Bangladesh. This study will therefore help development practitioners who especially deal with primary education both in formal and non formal settings to understand the concept and its implementation mechanism.

This study has observed that MTLA can be of use to support individual academic ability of children and reach especially hard to reach children in areas where access to education is limited or unavailable. Therefore, the approach is suitable for children from char, haor, hilly and also other challenged areas. In this study the author has emphasized that in special circumstances MTLA could effectively be adapted in formal system of education as well.

We hope that this study will generate interest among education practitioners and teachers alike general readers, and pave the way for replication of the approach as well as initiating further in depth study. We appreciate this humble effort from the author for undertaking this study as part of her academic research.

Dr. M Ehsanur Rahman
Executive Director
Dhaka Ahsania Mission

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Notes From The Researcher

This study focuses on the application of the Multi-grade Teaching/Learning Approach (MTLA) in an out-of-school non-formal education program for hard-to-reach children education in Bangladesh. The goal of the Multi-grade teaching learning approach is to develop innovative, flexible and child-centered approaches based on the needs of the local target groups. One purpose of the study is to sensitize the community and local government institutions about the importance of education for hard-to-reach children. The study explored how MTLA is being implemented in non-formal education settings and how this approach might be adapted in mainstream primary school. Although the mainstream primary educational context is different than that of non-formal education, there is potential for formal education to adapt some lessons from MTLA, such as group learning and student leadership, for the improvement of quality education for learners with disabilities or working children who otherwise might drop out of formal primary schooling. Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) uses the MTLA method in the non-formal education classes they provide for out-of-school children, aimed at preparing these children for age-appropriate further education delivered by formal schooling system. Using a qualitative research methodology, this study found that a flexible teaching/learning process, supportive supervision mechanism, leadership, students’ engagement, and mobilization are key elements of MTLA that are effective in designing educational opportunities for hard-to-reach children. If MTLA could be implemented in mainstream primary school, there is reason to believe that working and disabled children will get remedial support and drop out could be reduced. The study concludes that MTLA could be adapted to primary education for planning, training and educational resource development, which would be an improvement for hard-to-reach children over the current teaching/learning approach used in
mainstream formal schooling in Bangladesh. The flexibility of MTLA to reach children in isolated locations and in difficult conditions could be utilized in the mainstream education system. However, formal schools would need to deal with challenges such as teachers’ traditional mind set up, negative attitude of parents, summative assessment system etc. if they are to adopt MTLA for primary schools.

I would like to thank all those who helped me to continue the study. Firstly, it is my great pleasure to communicate my regards to the coordinator of the M.Ed Program Dr. Monica Gomes and all of the faculty members. Without their inspiration, it was not possible for me to continue my studies. Secondly, I would like to express my keen gratefulness to my Thesis Committee member Somnath Saha, who had significant contribution to conduct my study. Thirdly, I deeply appreciate the support of my mother, relatives, and all of the participants of the M.Ed. course. Fourthly, I am certainly grateful to Dhaka Ahsania Mission for helping me to get done this study without difficulty. Finally, I would like to convey my admiration to my lead advisor Dr. Cristine Smith for her insightful guidance during field research and thesis writing.

This thesis paper is dedicated to my beloved husband Late Shafiul Alam Khan Khadem, who laid to eternal rest in Heaven. Without his inspiration and support, prior to his death and even after, I might not be able to complete this thesis paper. This thesis is also dedicated to my little daughter Sajia Afsara, who helped me as a little mentor throughout the process of accomplishing the work.

May, 2015
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### Acronyms

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ATEO</td>
<td>Assistant Thana Education Officer</td>
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<td>AT</td>
<td>Assistant Teacher</td>
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<td>CLC</td>
<td>Children Learning Centre</td>
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<td>CAG</td>
<td>Centre Action Group</td>
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<td>CMC</td>
<td>Centre Management Committee</td>
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<td>CH</td>
<td>Case History</td>
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<td>DAM</td>
<td>Dhaka Ahsania Mission</td>
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<td>DPE</td>
<td>Directorate of Primary Education</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FPS</td>
<td>Formal Primary School</td>
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<td>GPS</td>
<td>Government Primary School</td>
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<td>HT</td>
<td>Head Teacher</td>
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<td>MT</td>
<td>Master Trainer</td>
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<td>MTLA</td>
<td>Multi-grade Teaching Learning Approach</td>
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<td>NFPE</td>
<td>Non Formal Primary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Government Organization</td>
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<td>NCTB</td>
<td>National Curriculum &amp; Textbook Board</td>
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<td>PTI</td>
<td>Primary Training Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMC</td>
<td>School Management Committee</td>
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<td>TEO</td>
<td>Thana Education Officer</td>
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<td>TC</td>
<td>Thesis Committee</td>
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<td>TO</td>
<td>Technical Officer</td>
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<td>URC</td>
<td>Upazilla Resource Centre</td>
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<td>UNIQUE</td>
<td>Up-scaling Non-formal primary education through Institutionalizing Qualitative Endeavour</td>
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CONTEXT

A boy named Nasim had a dream to play and sing with nature, believing that nature would help him in building his life. His dream ended due to poverty, when he had to quit school in order to work. He did not have access to school as the schools were located in far distance from their home. However, Nasim got an opportunity to continue his studies attending a Multi-grade school. Md. Nasim is a 10 years old boy. He studies at the Community Learning Center-1 at Ibrahimpur area in Dhaka city, where he learns Math, English, Bengali, Science at the Skill level and social science and religion at the Independent level. He is a working child. After school hours at 11.30 a.m., he sells vegetables. Nasim’s family lived in Kamalapur where he studied in a N.G.O school for 4 years. That school did not follow NCTB (National Curriculum & Textbook Board) text books. When admitted to the CLC, he entered at the Advanced level but improved to Independent within 8 months. He likes to read, sing, eat biscuits given by the school, and attend a neat and clean classroom. He likes to decorate classroom with the support of other students and the teacher. His teacher shows him affection. If he couldn’t come to school, he felt truly bad. One day he went to visit a Government Primary School and saw a teacher biting a child so he refused to get enrolled in that school. In future, he wants to be a police officer, so that he could build a peaceful country. (Case history: Md. Nasim, dated: 30/06/11)

This is an example of a “hard-to-reach” child in Bangladesh. There are a good number of “Nasims” who are out of school. In Bangladesh, the enrollment rate of children (aged 6-10) at primary level is about 91%, but about 19% of these students do not attend schools regularly and are at risk for dropping out of school. At present, approximately 9% children are out of school (Ghosh, 2010). Children from geo-physically and socio-economically neglected areas (coastal, haor i.e. oxbow lake,
urban slums and tribal areas) do not have access to formal primary schools.

There are 60,703 formal primary schools (FPS) in Bangladesh (DPE, 2007). In these mainstreamed FPS, there an unspecified number of working children or students with learning or physical disabilities who leave school before completion because of FPS’s rigid system. These children still deserve a primary education, and the UNIQUE project under DAM is providing them a “second chance”, using an innovative approach where children learn locally and together under one teacher. Both the Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) initiatives emphasized access to and equity in education by 2015. Children from poor segments of society, especially girls, should get priority and support to attend schools.

Along with five associated organizations, with the aid of the European Union, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) is implementing a flexible Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) program in 24 districts through the Up-scaling Non-formal primary education through Institutionalizing Qualitative Endeavor (UNIQUE) project. These non-formal education classes use a Multi-grade Teaching/Learning Approach (MTLA) to deliver educational services to out-of-school children. The primary feature of MTLA is that children of different ages, grades and abilities can learn together in the same group under one teacher. This approach has great potential for improving the quality of teaching and learning for all children. For this reason, I became interested to study the effectiveness of MTLA and its feasibility for being adopted in FPS to reach hard-to-reach children and prevent them from dropping out in the first place.

At present, not all children in Bangladesh are attending or completing primary school, and one reason for this is that the formal primary school’s structure and approach to instruction is inadequate to retain children in school. In some areas,
schools just are not available. Children, in particular girls, poor children, tribal populations, children with disabilities (CWD), and children living in disaster prone areas—such as coastal islands, river erosion and drought areas, and urban slums—find it more difficult to attend school (World Bank, 2004, p.71). Poverty is one of the major barriers hindering progress towards Education for All (EFA), since many of the poorest children need to start working at an early age and their involvement in economic activities makes it difficult or impossible to attend regular school hours. In addition to parents’ feelings that children need to work, the fixed and uniform timing of schools, distance to school, absence of roads, and natural disasters keeps children away from the school (UNIQUE Baseline Report, 2007, p.6).

The Multi-grade Teaching/Learning Approach (MTLA), offered through non-formal education programs, is an alternative comprehensive approach for grouping hard-to-reach children in one classroom in order to facilitate access to quality basic education service. In primary schools, the teacher-student ratio is 1:80 but the range for grades 1 and 2 varies between 1:70 and 1:100 or even more. In these cases, teachers cannot provide sufficient attention while managing overcrowded classrooms and hence fail to help children achieve essential learning. As a result, those who do not learn, drop out from schools. At present, there are no plans or resources to increase the number of teachers necessary for a more appropriate teacher-student ratio. Rather, this situation calls for adopting alternative classroom structures and approaches to ensure the success of all students (Sobhan, 2010). One potentially effective alternative approach to classroom instruction is the Multi-grade teaching learning approach (MTLA), an alternative comprehensive “one-room schoolhouse” approach, used in non-formal education contexts in both rural and urban areas, which “considers the local target group needs and devises supportive supervision mechanisms with stakeholder involvement” (Leaflet of UNIQUE project). Specifically, MTLA
may be beneficial for large classes because it incorporates methods such as student leadership and group learning, which essentially “expands” the teaching resources available by having children learn together and through peer learning.

To address the problem of ensuring access and success for all children, I wanted to understand how the experience of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, a Bangladeshi NGO using this approach, might be adopted by FPSs to ensure education of hard-to-reach children. In this study, I collected the perceptions of teaching staff in both NFE and FPS settings in order to understand their opinions about the possibilities and challenges in implementing MTLA in formal primary school.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the research is to explore the perceptions of teaching staff about Dhaka Ahsania Mission’s implementation of non-formal education classes, outside of the primary school, using MTLA to create new opportunities for hard-to-reach children to meet their learning needs. Specifically, the goal of my study is to identify the perceptions of NFE tutors (teachers) and local primary school staff about whether Multi-grade Teaching/ Learning Approaches (MTLA) can be implemented in mainstream primary school, and to identify the probable challenges and strategies to overcome these challenges that mainstream primary school staff may encounter when trying to implement MTLA in the formal primary classroom.

**METHODOLOGY**

In addition to the literature reviewed about the elements and success of the MTLA in Bangladesh and other countries, this study collected primary data through research participants’ interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, informal conversations, and case histories.
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

According to the education policy 2011, primary education has been extended from class 5 to 8. So, to implement the policy, adequate number of teachers as well as classrooms are required, which will eventually require more funding. Therefore, both educators and policy makers need to explore cost-effective ways to create scope for all children to ensure access to education, especially for hard-to-reach children such as those engaged in income generating activities, having learning disabilities or physical disabilities, or living in geographically isolated areas where there is no access to primary schools. The MTLA might be one way to restructure the education services so that more children can attend classes where they can learn, despite having widely varied knowledge and skill levels.

The Multi-Grade Teaching/ Learning Approach (MTLA) is a new concept in Bangladesh. Only DAM has been implementing this new approach in Bangladesh since 2007. I reviewed related literature, and did not find any research done on this topic in the area of primary education of Bangladesh. Consequently, the formal primary education system needs information about the applicability of the MTLA for use in its system. I hope that the findings of this study will help in supporting the improvement of the traditional education system.

These findings could help primary school teachers think about classroom management in both mono-grade and multi-grade classes and understands better the challenges of implementing MTLA in mainstream primary school. In addition, by identifying the supervisors’ role and responsibilities, it may help supervisors and head teachers understand the support teachers require in order to maintain the learning and persistence of hard to reach children.
If MTLA is effective, and if it can be adopted in primary schools, such a change may increase educational opportunities for all children through active participation of community, local government and education providers by being responsive to the needs of hard-to-reach children. In overcrowded classes, teachers’ load will be reduced by adopting the strategies of MTLA such as student leadership and group learning. If so, more children could be served, the accountability of the education providers will increase, and the financial pressure on the Government could decrease.
LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There is no exact definition of MTLA found in literature. According to Hargreaves et al., 2001, p.500), “We define ‘multi-grade’ classes as those where one teacher has sole responsibility for two or more grades, or classes, of pupils at the same time”. There are many terms used to illustrate multi-grade settings such as; ‘combination classes’ ‘forced mixed age classes’ and ‘forced mixed grade’. These terms generally arise through necessity and the characteristics of enrollment. The terms ‘vertical grouping’, ‘ungraded’, ‘non graded’, and ‘family grouping’ commonly arise through pedagogic preference (Little, 2004, p.6).

There are three situations in which multi-grade teaching in both developed and developing countries is organized. First, “multi-grade” is a ‘small’ school in remote and sparsely populated areas. Second, multi-grade schools offer irregular students enrollments in urban and sub-urban area schools. Third, multi-grade teaching is a purposeful reply to proponents of mixed age group learning to place various age group students together in the same classroom (Berry, n d). Little (2004) identified conditions under which multi-grade teaching arises. Multi-grade teaching is appropriate for those schools where only one or two teachers have to manage all grades, or where the population density is low, schools are widely scattered, students and teacher number are low, and in schools where teacher absenteeism is high. In a multi-grade school system, slow or returning learners get the opportunity to continue their study because of its flexibility. According to Little (2004, p-1), “learners who fail to be promoted from grade to grade become grade repeaters and join a group of learners in the previous grade”.

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Use of MTLA around the World

Many countries of the world are pursuing solutions for their educational problems by implementing Multi-grade school, including Ghana, Guatemala, Peru, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Egypt, India, and Vietnam. The extent of the multi-grade reality, in terms of schools, classes, teachers or students, is difficult to assess, since many countries do not collect even partial information routinely. In India, 84% of primary schools had 3 teachers or fewer in 1996; in Peru 78% of all public primary schools were multi-grade in 1998; in Sri Lanka 63% of all public schools had 4 or fewer teachers in 1996 and in Australia 40% of schools in the Northern Territories regions in 1988 were multi-grade.

Colombia is the country called the pioneer of multi-grade teaching learning approach. Multi-grade schools, using a model called Escuela Nueva, have played a major role in expanding education to the poor, particularly in rural areas (Colbert, 2009). The Escuela Nueva system is an example of how local innovation in education, which builds a relationship with the community and promotes a partnership with teachers, learners and the local community (Colbert, 2009), can become a national policy.

In India, there is no national government policy regarding multi-grade teaching, which results in suffering among a large number of schools. The National Policy on Education 1986 states that the Program of Mass Orientation of School Teachers and the Special Orientation Program for Primary School Teachers included a self-training module on multi-grade management. A few books and booklets have been produced to provide practical, locally relevant advice for teacher trainers and a theory-based module on multi-grade strategies is now included in the teacher training curriculum (Blum & Diwan, 2007).

The national primary school curriculum in Sri Lanka is oriented towards mono-grade schools. The organizational
realities facing the multi-grade teacher are not readily addressed in the formal guidance of the primary school syllabus, teachers' guides, and textbooks, pre-service and in-service training (Little, 1995). Recently the content of grades 1 and 2 curriculum has changed as many children in disadvantaged areas showed poor achievement in language skill. In Sri Lanka, the National Institute of Education and the Ministry of Education have recognized that mono-grade schools should include the teaching-learning processes practiced in the multi-grade schools. This understanding led to a pilot project in 20 schools for quality improvement in primary education. The long-term objective of this program is to explore the possibility of using multi-grade teaching in "normal" classrooms and in large mono-grade schools. Moreover, the program will introduce multi-grade teaching as a component of pre-service and in-service education, incorporating the experiences in a guide for teachers (Little, 1995).

In Ghana, through the School for Life (SfL) initiative, children are taught for 3 hours every afternoon when they finish their work. The teaching cycle (9 months) runs from October to June equivalent with the farming cycle, leaving the students free when the farming activities are at its highest in the rainy season from July to September. SfL applies multiple local languages (4 languages written forms) to achieve ethnic balance. The community can select their indigenous language where needed (School for Life).

In Sudan, mobile multi-grade schools provide 4 years of fundamental education for children in nomadic communities. As the community people move from one place to another, the teachers live and move along with the community (Larsen, K. & Hassan, M. 2001).

In Peru, the current educational strategies encourage multi-grade teaching and demonstrate an interesting change in attitudes towards multi-grade education. The prominent
process of expansion that brought schools to many remote areas was based on pedagogical methodologies embedded in the mono-grade paradigm. This incongruence between the reality of the classrooms and the pedagogic intent of the system is now coming into focus and receiving the consideration that it deserves.

**Key Elements of MTLA**

The literature identifies the key elements and goals of the Multi-grade Teaching/Learning Approach (MTLA). A positive learning environment is developed and adopted, paying attention to a child-centered, participatory and interactive teaching methodology with dialogue, questions and affirmation of the children’s contributions (School for Life). In a multi-grade school system, there are some basic inputs; for instance, classroom management, learning material, library, learning corners, self-instructional textbooks, child-to-child tutoring, and a student council that contribute to improved learning. In multi-grade schools, students learn through both small group work, individual work, and whole class activities. According to Schiefelbein (1991), trapezoidal tables are suitable for group work. Traditional benches or desks fixed to the floor limit the possibility of group work. Multi-grade schools use flat tables that are arranged for a group of four or five students. The teacher organizes the students through grouping them by grades or by ability, sometimes form small groups or invite children to work individually, or use large groups or the whole class together (Hargreaves et al., 2001). Working together develops democratic values among the students. Students play a specific role in the group, such as the role of a facilitator, checker or reporter (Schiefelbein, 1991).

of various learning materials like pictures and posters by the students of different grades can act as a resource for other learners. According to DeStefano, (2006, p.6), “facilitators and children develop materials together that are used in the classroom”. The learners of multi-grade schools can learn by self-direction using different types of learning corners. In Egypt, students spend a significant portion of the day working individually or in small groups on self-planned projects in learning corners organized for math, science or art (DeStefano, 2006). In Sri Lanka, mixed-grade groups of students have worked on learning assignments at agriculture plots within the school grounds. By observation and experimentation, students can learn better. According to Bruner (n d), discovery learning encourages students to actively use their sense to find out the interrelationships between different concepts through inductive reasoning where students can observe, analyze, understand, and verify their concepts.

The curriculum is a vital element of multi-grade schools where students, teachers and community examine and develop their ideas through active engagement. A major reason for the Escuela Nueva success was teachers’ and communities’ ownership to reform flexible curriculum. Guatemalan educators devised curriculum learning guides and teacher guides based on their own experiences including bilingual materials (Kline, 2002). Multi-grade settings also apply formative assessment systems to promote learning. The teachers assess individual merits rather than treating all learners as if they were at the same level (Brown, 2008). According to Schiefelbein (1991), sick absences or seasonal work-related absenteeism of students do not involve repeating the grade next year, since they can simply continue learning in the module following. This policy mainly benefits hard-to-reach students who typically have a high repetition rate.

According to the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), teachers are the key element in promoting quality education in schools. When teachers understand diversity in learning styles and in
the physical and intellectual development of students, they can generate stimulating, participatory learning environments. In multi-grade schools, teachers play various roles such as facilitator, material developer, representative of values, community linkage builder and counselor, etc. According to DeStefano (2006), young women are recruited locally to be facilitators, with special attention paid to their capacity for innovation, creativity, and sensitivity to children’s needs. For example, Escuela Nueva teachers in Columbia are encouraged not to shout instructions or focus on custodial control of students. As a facilitator, he/she motivates students to do the extra work, encourages counseling of students with problems, and leads students to learn through cooperative interaction and increased self-determination (Schiefelbein, 1991). The tutor spreads values such as democracy, interaction, and cooperation among the students in Multi-grade school. In both Guatemala and Colombia, children have demonstrated improvement in self-esteem and civic behavior with peaceful social interaction (Colbert, 2009).

In multi-grade schools, supervisors provide several types of support such as technical, managerial and motivational activities. In Egypt, supervisors provide continuous support to the facilitators and the community. A field supervisory team and a technical supervisory team manage and monitor the community school initiatives. Management and supervisory teams are trained on team building and teamwork and the evaluations are team based. Technical, field and managerial expertise all contribute to a learning system approach to the initiative (DeStefano, 2006). Teacher support is the most crucial component of Escuela Nueva’s success (Kline, 2002). To provide teachers with educational materials, resources, and opportunities for capacity building, the Ministry trains local supervisors to serve as pedagogical advisors to teachers. This requirement by the central government acknowledges the necessity of leadership in carrying out a major change.
The community people are an essential part of schools, which includes parents, teachers, religious institutions, political leaders, marginalized groups, social workers etc. The community plays multiple roles in the management of learning systems, such as school maintenance, discipline, resource mobilization etc. (Community Participation, 2006). In different regions, different types of multi-grade schools also found that the community could play this role. In Egypt, the community provides a school site with existing infrastructure deemed suitable for the number of children to be enrolled, and determines the school hours and days will be in session. The committee participates in teacher selection and sometimes takes part in classroom facilitation. In multi-grade schools, adult community members who have knowledge in some special curricular areas involve themselves in discussions with the students on some topics or give a presentation on content (DeStefano, 2006). In Ghana, the community forms a school committee that is responsible for the SfL class and the maintenance of the school. Community members pay facilitators in cash, foodstuffs or labor. The committee is structured. They nominate children (8-14 ages) where girls get priority to be enrolled in classes (School for life). In Sudan teachers receive incentives from the community as the government salary is inadequate (Larsen, K. & Hassan, M. 2001).

**Challenges to Implementing MTLA**

One challenge to implementing MTLA is lack of understanding or misunderstanding about what MTLA is and how it works. Parental attitudes towards multi-grade schooling are generally negative. Many parents do not understand the practice of putting younger and older learners together. They are concerned about the structure, both within the class and the grade (Brown, A B.2008). Teachers’ attitudes towards multi-grade schools are also usually negative. In the Peruvian
Amazon, multi-grade teachers distinguish the mono-grade class is popular as they think multi-grade is a “second class” necessity. In the Turks and Caicos Islands, teachers voiced negative remarks for the burden of lesson planning imposed by the multi-grade classroom (Brown, A B.2008). According to Little (1995), the assessment system creates more burdens for multi-grade teachers who have to produce tests for several levels. Moreover, a lack of teacher accountability, poor basic physical facilities, and untrained supervisors hamper proper functioning of this system.

According to Little (2001), knowledge of multi-grade teaching strategies is needed by all teachers. The training package for changing teachers’ attitudes consists in learning how to implement learning materials and other inputs. In Nepal, teacher training emphasizes preparing lesson plans, self-learning activities (SLA) and classroom management required for multi-grade teaching and for teaching students in two or more classes simultaneously. In Malawi, teachers acknowledge how songs act as a means of group management. In Ghana, facilitators receive three weeks intensive initial training on pedagogical strategies like mother tongue education, functional teaching materials, child-centered learning, timing of classes, and community animation. On the other hand, Peruvian (Amazon, Peru) teachers developed multi-grade lessons and classes without having had any training (Pincas, 2007).

Cultural diversity is a crucial challenge to implement multi-grade teaching/learning approach, since teachers must deal with multiple languages as well as multiple age and skill levels. For example, Peru is a country of about 40 Amazonian languages, and the incidence of Spanish being spoken as a non-mother tongue is particularly high in rural areas. Rural primary education therefore suffers from sustained linguistic and cultural dislocation (Hargreaves et al., 2001).
Limited technology is also a challenge for training and support multi-grade classroom teachers. Countries use a variety of communication technologies in multi-grade schools such as one-way, two-way, low power and digital radio in order to provide guidelines to teachers and students to understand print materials. The Australian Radio School of the Air reaches scattered aboriginal groups of children using a low power radio station (Wolff and Garcia, 2000). In Ghana, community radio produces educational cassette tapes in the local language for supporting the facilitators’ classroom work (School for Life).

**Effectiveness of MTLA**

Among 11 Latin American countries, Colombia is the second country that achieved higher results in rural public schools than in urban ones, except in megacities, and multi-grade classes could explain part of those results. Several evaluations have confirmed that children from Escuela Nueva have achieved higher scores in language and mathematics in the 3rd and 5th grades. Some children showed scores above the national average. Drop out and repetition rates were significantly reduced. In Soacha region, 55% of children were excluded from school in 2003; after one year of intervention, there was 100% enrollment, and these results are being replicated in other areas (Colbert, 2009).

In Bangladesh, educational experience also shows significant achievements of Multi-grade system. The UNIQUE project found from their midterm evaluation findings that the students’ response to this new approach is surprisingly good. The attendance of students has increased along with their performance. In multi-grade schools, enrollments total 93,263. Among them, about 20,000 students were mainstreamed. 700 students appeared in primary terminal examination in 2011. The result illustrates the fact that the pass rate is almost 100% (Internal official report of DAM, 01/08/11).
**Conceptual Framework**

The purpose is to explore whether and how MTLA might be applied in the formal primary education system of Bangladesh for hard-to-reach children. The conceptual framework for this study is based on the Constructivism Theory supported by Freire, Dewy, & Vygotsky. According to Lev Vygotsky, constructivism is a multiplicity of learning that emphasizes collaboration among learners. It is possible to make learning diversified according to its social context. According to this theory, knowledge is not simply constructed, it is co-constructed. The level of potential development depends on cognitive structures that are still in the process of maturing with the assistance of collaboration with others. Collaborative learning methods require learners to develop teamwork skills and to see individual learning as essentially related to the success of group learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The constructivism theory maintains that the educator’s responsibility is to create a learning environment and opportunities where the students can learn collaboratively through self-directed learning, transformational learning, experiential learning and reflective practice. According to Vygotsky, adults’ involvement in children’s tasks encourages them to purify their thinking or perform more successfully.

The eminent educationalist Paulo Freire argued that traditional (non-constructivist) education is an act of depositing, in which the teacher is the depositor and the students are the depositories where they patiently receive, memorize, and repeat what the teacher says. Freire called this the “banking” concept of education. In the banking concept of education, teachers assume an absolute ignorance among students, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, which negates education and knowledge as process of inquiry. Paulo Freire denies the present banking system of education and encourages problem posing education. Problem-posing education, which breaks with banking education by organizing
education through dialogue and teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school. The students’ response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed (Freire, 1993).

In another way, John Dewey’s educational theories emphasize that the educational process must be built upon the interest, thinking, and interconnection of the new experience and reorganize the cognitive structure of the child. His teaching method is mainly activity based, which is supported Multi-grade system. (Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, 2008). In my study, I will use these concepts to identify evidence that these concepts and theories are being applied in NFE classes using the MTLA.
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study focused on finding out how MTLA might improve educational opportunities for hard-to-reach children, and how and whether this approach could be implemented in mainstream primary schools. Two Tutors, one Supervisor, one Master trainer, one Program Coordinator from DAM and one Head Teacher, one ATEO from mainstream primary educational personnel were interviewed to collect data. I also collected data from Focus Group Discussions with CMCs and CAGs. In this section I present the findings according to seven categories and themes while analyzing the collected data:

- Teaching/learning process.
- MTLA implementation process.
- Tutor, supervisor and community people’s roles in implementing MTLA.
- Challenges of implementation of MTLA in NFE program,
- Advantages of implementing MTLA in GPS.
- Implementation challenges faced by mainstream primary schools.
- Strategies to overcome challenges in mainstream formal primary schools.

Theme 1: Teaching/Learning Process

In MTLA, the teaching/learning process emphasizes the importance of an enjoyable learning environment, with child-centered and activity based learning. The approach advocates using a balanced combination of whole class activities, peer learning, and small group learning. The teacher’s task is to promote students’ engagement and student leadership through project work, extracurricular activities, a customized syllabus, and a competency-based assessment system. MTLA advocates no home work, no punishment, and flexible school time and contact hours. I will present my findings on each of these areas, based on observations of the learning centers and interviews with key respondents.
An enjoyable learning environment attracts students to come to school. Classroom decoration is one of the elements of an enjoyable learning environment. According to my observation field notes, CLC-1 was neat and clean. The classroom was decorated with alphabet letters and numbers, charts, pictures, posters and a project board prepared by tutors and learners. There were also two bookshelves where decorated supplementary reading materials, learners’ notebooks, pens, pencils, blackboard, small mobile board and biscuit packets were kept. (Observation field note, 21/06/11)

Child-centered learning is essential to implement MTLA. Multi-grade classes combine children of many ages, grades, and skills where all are learning jointly. Each child is assessed and educated according to his or her talent.

In the time of classroom observation I found that tutor assess each students learning at the time of class, end of the class of each subjects. Not only that but also every Thursday tutor takes written test every students on the basis on their merit and grade (Observation field note, dated: 21/06/11 & 28/06/11)

Activity-based learning was also seen in MTLA classes. In this teaching/learning process, students learn through different types of activity. The technical officer commented, “In MTLA students show different types of activity in leisure time such as game, spelling competition, IQ test etc.” (Appendix-D). (Interview-10, TO, dated: 28/06/11). I also directly observed a variety of activities within the CLC classes: “Students learn by active participation through role play, song, dance etc.” (Observation field note, dated: 21/06/11)

In CLC-1 all the students were participated with a song about numeracy. Almost 5 minutes they engaged with this activity at the starting time of Mathematics class. Again they presented a role play on tree plantation at the starting time of Science class. In CLC-3 all of the students were involved with a dance on season of Bangladesh. Nearly 5 minutes they busy at the beginning time of Bengali class (Observation field note, dated: 21/06/11)
Whole class activity is a compulsory component of teaching learning process (MTLA). According to my observation field note, at the time of starting each class in each CLC for instance, Science, English & Math learners sing songs and recite poems related their lessons. (Observation field note, dated: 23/06/11)

Peer learning is a critical component of MTLA, since the teacher cannot teach and pay attention to every student all the time. In CLC-3, there were different grades of students, including those students who will participate in the Primary Terminal Examination (PTE). Here, I observed the tutor applying peer work to manage the class in a small place. Students gave feedback to one another in the same group of students. According to the tutor:

*In limited space (CLC-3), there was no scope to put more tables as there are students who will appear in PTE. So I managed the sitting arrangements to apply some techniques. I settled lower grade students at each table so the junior students get support from senior grade students. (Interview-2, Tutor-2, dated: 22/06/11)*

One of the male students also said, “When any younger learner asks me any question and learns that answer with my assistance, then I feel very proud”. (Informal conversation, dated: 23/06/11). The ATEO observed that:

*In one classroom students of different grades learn collaboratively through peer tutoring so that students can learn by mutual understanding. As there are no bindings students can learn easily according to their ability (Interview-6, ATEO, dated: 26/06/11)*

Group learning gives the students a chance to transform their learning. One of the guardians reported,

*I observed that all the students learn in a group. At first tutor discuss the topic in a group. After that, group members discuss that topic among themselves. If anybody cannot understand, then more efficient student help others. (FGD-1, Mother, dated: 23/06/11)*
Student engagement is another important element of MTLA. The tutor aims to increase students’ engagement in the learning process to respond to students’ learning demands. A female assistant teacher of the government primary school said,

In multi-grade school tutor’s role is passive and students’ role is massive. Tutor does responsibility as a monitor and must be active more to engage students in work. (Interview-8, FAT, dated: 28/06/11)

Student leadership is needed to support the tutor’s teaching, since MTLA allows one tutor to teach a wide range of children in one class. One of the students (girl) commented,

As a leader, I conducted physical exercise, helped tutor, checked others notebook, helped others learn lessons. As a result my lessons also become clear. I experience good to teach others and also feel proud. (Informal conversation, dated: 30/06/11)

No homework is assigned in Multi-grade classes because the majority of students are working children. So it is not possible to do home work after class. All respondents discussed this aspect of MTLA. A female assistant teacher commented,

Many of our students have no scope for reading at home. A lot of students have no chair- table or sitting arrangement in home. No person to take care that they do their homework. In this approach, children can learn by teacher’s care. Students get help immediately. (Interview-8, FAT, dated: 28/06/1)

A flexible time schedule means that the length of period is helpful for completing lessons without homework. The length of each period in MTLA is 45-60 minutes. Within this 60 minutes, students practice previous lessons, learn new lessons, prepare lessons, and the lessons are evaluated at school. So there is no need for homework. (Observation field note, dated: 21/06/11). Flexible school time is suitable for the students and supervisor because the CLC runs on the needs of the students in each locality. Some CLCs start at 8.00a.m., some
at 10.00a.m. and some at 2.00p.m. So working children can join any CLC that matches the best time for them. Supervisors can supervise every CLC for flexible timing. From one of the case history I found that:

Rassel (10 years old) is a day laborer at a local vegetable market. He works 7 a.m-9 a.m. then comes to CLC. After finishing the school (10a.m.- 1p.m.) he goes home for lunch and then returns to work till late night. (Case history-Rassel, dated: 23/06/11)

No punishment is one of the most important criteria of MTLA. A child-friendly tutor always shows patience and caring to the students. One of the students (Boy) said, “Madam is good. She loves me and never hits”. (Informal conversation, dated: 26/06/11)

Project work is a vital element of MTLA. In Social Science and Science class, students prepare different types of project individually. Tutor-1 reported:

At first I describe a topic on Social Science or Science such as hygienic and unhygienic latrine. Then I go to outside with the students and create chance for students to observe these things. After observation they prepare an individual project. (Interview-1, Tutor-1, dated: 21/06/11)

Extra Curricular Activities reinforce students’ learning and create eagerness to come to school. MTLA also emphasizes such activities. According to my observation field notes,

During my second visit to CLC-1 on Thursdays I saw that in the last period learners and Tutors jointly performed music, drama, songs etc. in curricular activities period. In CLC-3 there were students engaged in drawing. (Observation field note, dated: 30/06/11)

A customized syllabus is critical to the MTLA approach. As the students are generally weak in Mathematics and English, these two subjects are always included in the full syllabus. But other subjects are tailored to student needs indicated in the academic year plan. Tutor-1 said,
In Multi-grade schools there are year duration 9 months. So, we follow whole syllabus about Mathematics & English but others subjects (science, social science, religion) syllabus are customized. In class routine (Appendix: D) include Mathematics & English class daily because students generally weak in these subjects. (Interview-1, Tutor-1, dated: 21/06/11)

A flexible assessment system creates the opportunity for daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly assessment, which is preferable to students:

If one child cannot attend an exam at the scheduled time he/she could attend that another suitable time. If one fails a subject then we take special care to help them remediate within three months. They need not lose one year. So they are happy. (Interview-2, Tutor-2, dated: 22/06/11)

By contrast, in the formal government primary schools, quarterly-yearly exams make students afraid of whether they pass or fail! If any students fails in one subject, they are not promoted to the next grade. Thus children get disheartened and lose interest in studying. In the non-formal education classes, using MTLA, exams happen weekly and monthly, so children don’t feel afraid because they are used to regular exams. (FGD-3, Mother, dated: 30/06/11.)

Instead, MTLA advocates a periodic assessment process that can help individual learners and advanced learners move to the next level. Since it considers individual competencies, a fast learner moves faster towards the upper grades:

In MTLA formative assessment system no year loss for students fails. There is a scope for students to make up test. Students get additional advantage such as if any one achieve their competencies before due time then they can up graded next step before fixed cycle. (Interview-4, HT, dated: 23/06/11)

Theme 2: Implementation Strategies of MTLA

Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), the organization sponsoring the non-formal education classes that use the MTLA approach, is using strategies to strengthen the program, such as capacity building of the community members, mobilizing resources,
establishing a linkage between formal and non-formal education with GO & NGO collaboration, involving local government institutions, and designing interrelated interventions in different sectors including education, livelihood, health and human rights. These strategies are implemented in an integrated manner and institutionalized gradually to enhance the living conditions of the target community. For example, DAM provided an orientation course for Center Action Group (CAG) and Center Management Committee (CMC) members to build their capacity to manage the CLC. Now the community members on these committees know how to operate a bank account and maintain deposits, how to collect financial and other resources from different source, and how to prepare a plan to run the CLC. CAG & CMC members reported various ways about capacity building. One of the Male Respondents (MR) said,

We do not want to stop the process of DAM that contributes towards educating underprivileged children. We will build up cooperative organization rich by educated people. We will take initiatives to run the CLC project after its closing. (FGD-2, dated: 26/06/11)

The DAM supervisor conducts communication, mobilization, awareness and linkage activities among the various local organizations, such as the community health care institute and loan providers. The families of students are indirectly helped through these associations. Poor parents get opportunities to receive loans with less interest or free treatment and medicine from health care institutions. DAM also provides technical education for students, such as how to build and grow a livelihood. One of the girls (Chamelli) reported,

My mother admitted me in CLC because she heard from the Tutor that after completion of my studies (grade-5) I can take admission in a technical & vocational training centre of DAM. There is a scope for poor students to receive training with a little amount of money. (Chamelli, dated: 21/06/11)
Chamelli’s tutor also confirmed that there were opportunities for work.

DAM collaborates with the Government. DAM, with the help of the community, supervisor and tutor, identifies migrant and dropout children from mainstream primary schools through baseline surveys. The CLC tutor gives them intensive attention to achieve all the competencies. In this way, according to the Head Teacher, DAM creates a pathway for non-formal education students to mainstream back into formal education:

In Vashantech slum area Salma lived with her parents. She read in class three in GPS. Suddenly their house was broken and they were migrated to Ibrahimpur slum area. In the mid of the year, Salma did not get a chance to admit herself in any GPS. After taking initiatives by social workers, she got admitted into CLC -1 in Grade-3. Now she is a student of mainstream GPS in class-4. Dated: 28/06/11)

DAM implemented alternative approach to adapt to diverse geographical contexts where there are resource constraints such as no sufficient teacher, no sufficient students for specific grade, no materials, and no money. In these situations, the core team of DAM has to come up with an alternative way of offering classes to students, and alternative strategies for recruiting, training, monitoring and supervising tutors. Thus, they adopted the more flexible MTLA teaching/learning approach, as the UNIQUE Program Coordinator describes:

> MTLA is being implemented conceptualizing Bangladeshi context-its geographical backwardness, needs of out of school children, dropout children alongside local people’s demand, hope, and their life style. (Interview-11, PC, dated: 29.06.11)

Tutors’ recruitment activities seek locally, child-friendly young female person with a Secondary School Certificate (SSC). However, if there is no available and suitable tutor with this qualification, then someone with less academic qualifications can also be recruited.
DAM provides training for teacher/tutor and technical staff professional development, described by the master trainer (MT) and technical officer (TO):

12- day basic pedagogic training was initially provided and later on a tailor made 4- day version of this training is provided for the newly recruited tutors and staff members. In this training tutors learn about child-centered learning, different types of activities, lesson plan basis on 5 activities. They also know how prepared low-cost, non-cost material. (Interview-5, MT, dated: 23/06/11)

I conduct refresher training for the tutors every month. In this training supervisors also attend with the tutors. Tutors share their ideas, views, and experiences among themselves. Different types of problem solve in this session through demo class. (Interview-10, TO, dated: 28/06/11)

DAM established a team or “cell”, made up of Supervisor, Technical officer, Area manager, Master trainer, Monitoring officer and Regional manager, to monitor the CLCs continuously:

I monitor 40 CLCs in Mirpur-1 area in every month. If supervisors failed met-up any conflict among the committee members then I take initiatives. I request my entire work partner; please don’t create any information gap among us. I deliver them some easy technique that may help them to create joyful environment for learning. (Interview-10, TO, dated: 28/06/11)

This is a supportive supervision mechanism with a built-in system for participatory monitoring. The Supervisor acts as a facilitator, mentor and coach to tutors, which is important since the tutors are young and somewhat undereducated. DAM emphasizes academic supervision rather than administrative supervision:

I supervise two full visits and half time follow-up visit each CLC weekly. Sometimes I myself conduct a class to afford immediate feedback to the Tutor. In refresher training, I provide advance support based on academic plan for next month activities. (Interview -3, Supervisor, dated: 23/06/11)
Indigenous and supplementary no- or low-cost learning materials are being used to implement MTLA while meeting the curriculum framework for mainstreaming NFPE children established by the NCTB (National Curriculum & Textbook Board). DAM also recruits indigenous tutors and uses indigenous languages in the teaching/learning process for ethnic minority children education:

DAM supplies story books, paper cuttings, poems, IQ test book to develop students’ reading skills and intelligence. Besides these I use non-cost material like bundle, stick, stone, seeds which are collected by the students. (Interview -2, Tutor-2, dated: 23/06/11)

**Theme 3: Tutors, Supervisors and Community’s Role in Implementing MTLA**

**Tutors:** I discussed the role of tutors with tutors themselves, and also with students and guardians (FGD). All students and guardians expressed the same feelings: they all are very satisfied with the performance of the tutors, commenting that “Madam” (what students and guardians call the female tutors) is a good tutor and her teaching is obviously good (*Madam balo, pora balo; madam balo, pora balo*). One of the respondents (mother) of FGD-3 commented:

*Within 3 hours, the tutor completes all lessons. The tutor is perfect in all sides (Allahar rohmote madamer matha tihk ase, balai chalaitase). The tutor teaches how to perform dance, song, drama nicely. The environment of the school is good and the learning is joyful ( Shobar kase shikkata anondo, schooler porata anondo, mojar pora pore aihone). (FGD-3, Mother, dated: 30/06/11)*

*Madam comes regularly. If any student does not come to school then she brings him/her from home. Attending the CLC, students learnt many things which they did not learn from GPS. My niece reads in GPS, I saw my child can read better than her. Moreover, my elder daughter reads in GPS. She also checks her younger sister’s reading. (FGD-1, Mother, dated: 23/06/11)*
The tutor uses techniques such as a mobile board for group teaching to manage the class. Where the numbers of students are fewer, the tutor does Mathematics in a student’s own notebook. A big board is used for evaluation. As the Tutor-1 said:

*When I move from one table to another, then I keep them busy with some activities so that they do not make noise. If I give reading to any group, then I ask another group of students to write something. If I give a written task in one table then another table is given a reading task. I stay with another table.* (Interview-1, Tutor-1, dated: 21/06/1)

The tutor plays a vital role of facilitator, material developer, representative of values, a community linkage builder, a counselor and an evaluator. One of the mothers said:

*At first we did not understand about MTLA. Now we know its principles. The tutor always communicates with us and briefs us about children’s learning. We feel that one school, one room, one master; all are working collaboratively and that is why the CLC is running very nicely with the support of the tutor.* (FGD-1, Mother, dated: 23/06/11)

Both the tutors interviewed expressed similar views regarding the teaching/learning direction. The lesson plan includes five task-oriented activities, such as recap, daily routine work, practice and evaluation. As Tutor-2 said,

*In our lesson plan there are 4 sections such as Beginner, Advanced, Skilled and Independent. We write down lesson plan grade wise, subject wise and 5 tasks based lesson plan. For slow learners we follow previous lesson plan and give them intensive care and extra time after class to recover the lesson.* (Interview-2, Tutor-2, dated: 22/06/11)

For students’ better understanding, the tutor follows an inductive approach that focuses on known-to-unknown, near-to-far, easy-to-difficult:

*When I teach about family then I cannot first say what family is. At first I tell them a story or incidents about a family. I show them pictures. I ask them questions. When students realize the*
topic, then I go to the main theme. I find out hard words or new words and present it in easy way. (Interview-1, Tutor-1, dated: 21/06/11)

From the classroom observations, it was discovered similarities between the two tutors’ activities: “The tutor facilitated the class according to lesson plan. She interacted with the students and evaluated learners’ performance at the end of the class” (Observation note, dated: 22/06/11). The observation findings also revealed that tutors create opportunities for students' leadership while facilitating the teaching/learning process in classroom, which was also reported by the tutors themselves:

Throughout the session, we cannot give time in all tables. Moreover, I cannot check notebooks of every student. So, I make leaders for each group. I check only leaders’ notebook. The leaders check other students’ notebooks. The Leaders are selected on skill basis. They are selected by rotation based on their performance. So, they hold fresh minds. (Interview-2, Tutor-2, dated: 22/06/11)

Tutors select students to enroll in the CLC classes and prepare each student’s profile. In CLC, most of the students are dropouts, slow learners or out-of-school children. In CLCs, admission follows a different method than in formal primary school:

When new students come for admission then I do not admit them without baseline assessment. At first I judge the prior experience of students learning and then administer an assessment which incorporates specific questions focused on 5 micro works supplied from centrally. (Interview-1, Tutor-1, dated: 21/06/11)

Supervisors: To implement MTLA, supervisors play a significant role in resource mapping, formation of a CAG committee, baseline survey of students, establishment of the CLC, resource mobilization, community involvement, linkages between GO & NGO, and promoting communication with others social service providers:
At first I communicate with HT, SMC, house owner’s association commissioner to conduct FGD for establishing CLC. As a leader I communicate, mobilize, and build linkage with cooperative organizations like health care centre, loan provider organization etc. to give livelihood support among students’ parents. (Interview-3, Supervisor, dated: 22/06/11)

As a leader, the supervisor increases the community involvement with CLC. One of the male respondents from FGD no-2 talked about supervisor’s activities for community involvement:

To involve me in the CAG & CMC committee supervisor requested me almost daily. At first I could not tolerate supervisor because every day he used to irritate me so much. He used to attach with me (supervisor amar pisu laigai thakto, kemne kemne jani pore aikhane jokto hoilam). Anyhow, he involved me with the activities of CLC. (FGD-2, MR, dated: 26/06/11)

Academically, the supervisor plays a major role in increasing guardians’ awareness about the CLC non-formal education classes, ensuring students’ regular attendance, undertaking monitoring and supervision for the CLC, giving feedback to the tutors, preparing monthly and quarterly evaluation form and supporting grading of the students:

I monitor and supervise CLC to assess Tutors and Students performance. For this I check daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly evaluation record and prepare report and give support according to the needs of the tutors. If any teacher leaves the CLC then newly recruited tutors receives full month intensive support to prepare themselves. (Interview-3, Supervisor, dated: 22/06/11).

Community support: The CLCs are running with the support of the community. The role of the community is remarkable, as they take initiatives to mobilize resources for the classes, increase awareness among guardians, collect funds, solve any problems, and build linkages with mainstream GPS:
We motivate house owners to take low rent for the home for CLC. We communicate with garments owners for warm clothes for the children. Last year we distributed 200 warm clothes among students. Some people cannot provide money but they walk from door to door and various organizations to collect resources. (Interview-7, CAG president, dated: 26/06/11)

The people of our community are very helpful. They think about how they can run the CLC when the project will stop operating. They gave us fan, mat, books etc. Sometimes they come and observe what children are learning. Am I following the school time properly? Is the school closed before scheduled time or not? (Interview no-1, Tutor-1, Date: 21/06/11)

In national days, the school arranges cultural competition. That time community contributes for prize distribution. The tutor also gets a prize. (Interview-7, CAG president, dated: 26/06/11)

**Theme 4: Challenges of Implementation MTLA in NFE Programs**

At the initial stage, implementers faced challenges with the MTLA approach since it is new in Bangladesh. Lack of guardians’ awareness, negative perception among community people and GPS’s teachers, inappropriate resource mapping and resource mobilization, and even the rent for CLC space were found to be the most common challenges. First, the community’s and guardians' perception were not favorable for running the CLC:

*Guardians were not aware about children education. They think if children go for work they can earn cash money instantly, which is more profitable than attending schools. Some people are very soft but some are hard like stone. No incentive pushes them to contribute. They will pass lazy time watching satellite channels but reluctant to spend time for social work*. (FGD-2, male respondents of CAG & CMC dated: 26.06.11)

In the first two years I just cried. The overall environment was very difficult. Community people were not helpful, and guardians were not willing to send their child to CLC. Most of
guardians said that in GPS one student of grade 3 reads all the subjects of grade 3. But here, one student reads different subjects of different grades at a time. What type of school is this! (Interview-1, Tutor-1, dated-21.06.11)

Preparing monthly and quarterly evaluation sheets, increasing community contributions making competency-based questions and providing related technical support were also considered challenging, according to the technical Officer (TO):

The whole set of activities are challenging. Providing basic and refresher training to tutors, providing technical support, reducing drop-out rate, increasing community contribution, preparing and maintaining different types of reports such as grading information, cohort chart, log form etc. are difficult. (Interview-10, TO, dated: 28/06/11)

The supervisors faced difficulties in preparing tools for resource mapping, mobilizing resources, renting houses, filling up tutors’ vacant posts, ensuring students’ regular attendance, and changing the perception of School Management Committee members:

First time I faced the challenge of mobilizing the local donor. The most challenging part was resource mapping. It was difficult to find local people who were interested in promoting learning and can assist CLC. SMC’s concept on MTLA was not good. They thought, what will a NGO teach? They just come and go without making any difference. (Interview-3, Supervisor, dated: 22.06.11)

As the supervisor was a not local person, nobody wanted to lease their home to the supervisor. They were afraid of not getting the payment regularly”. (Interview-7, CAG & CMC president, dated: 26.06.11)

Tutors faced challenges in the teaching/learning process such as preparing grade-wise lesson plan, managing classrooms, and teaching according to training

Tutors faced challenge to implement concepts learnt from training in some areas. To develop students’ intelligence, concept mapping, mind mapping, and reading must be used. But
some tutors did not apply these activities properly. Also tutors faced problems in the area of teaching Mathematics using real objects like bundle, stick, seeds etc. (Interview-5, MT, dated: 23/06/11).

In urban areas, there was the problem of getting a suitable classroom for CLC. CLC-3 was only 8 feet x 9 feet area. Because of this limited space, the tutors faced challenges in managing the classroom: classroom management is too difficult. Different graded students attend a class. All the students do not read the same subject. One student reads in Advance, again he/she reads in Skill. Because of this, teaching becomes difficult. Also, sitting arrangement becomes problematic because of inadequate space. (Interview-2, Tutor-2, dated; 22/06/11)

Initially I was very afraid, could not manage classroom properly. If I facilitate the children of one table, then students of other tables start to make noise”. (Interview-1, Tutor-1, dated: 21/06/11)

I suggest some recommendations to address these challenges, though out comprehensively, in conclusion chapter of this study.

**Theme 5: Advantages of Implementing MTLA in Mainstream GPS**

There are advantages of implementing MTLA that may be applicable to mainstream primary schools. In mono-grade classrooms, slow learners feel bad when they fail. Instead, the MTLA approach nurtures slow learners especially and allows them to develop their skills, since the class, by definition, includes students at many different levels. As a result, the drop-out rate reduces. Eventually, it is expected that the results will improve. Students’ and parents’ eagerness for learning will increase, and deprived children will come up with same level of skills as other students. Two assistant teachers stated that:
If MTLA can be applied properly, it is certain that there would be no more drop out children. As a result, Governments’ policy ‘education for all, 2015’ will achieve”. (Interview-9, MAT, dated: 28/06/11).

In MTLA, without year loss children get remedy. As a result, students are encouraged to continue their study. However, no child is upgraded unless they achieve the competencies. Thus teachers are also motivated to teach. (Interview-8, dated: 28/06/11)

Another potential advantage of MTLA in formal primary schools is that the imbalance in teacher-student ratio will be balanced through applying MTLA.

Teachers’ workload is reduced by utilizing students’ leadership. (Interview-8, dated: 28/06/11)

From my previous experience, I found that some schools assigned 5-6 teachers for only 40-50 students whereas some school has huge number of students but teachers are less. In this situation MTLA is perfect for those schools. If government implement need-based MTLA in mainstream GPS and rearrange the teacher number among those schools, Governments’ pressure will reduce. As a result government and students will be benefited. (Interview-5, ATEO, dated: 26/06/11)

**Theme 6: Implementation Challenges Faced by Mainstream Primary Schools**

From the data, it appears that implementing MTLA in mainstream primary schools would create different types of challenges, related to the attitudes about MTLA amongst mainstream school teachers, guardians and SMC members. All the respondents agreed that primary school teachers are overloaded with work, and they are perhaps not ready to make the extra effort of learning and adopting MTLA, even if it would save them work in the long-term within the classroom, as expressed in the views of an assistant teacher and a SMC member:
Some teachers say dur thak (it is not necessary to implement MTLA). Teachers need to give additional inputs. Here teaching different grades students in same class within 3 hours will be a matter of headache. So it seems to be a burden (Interview -9, MAT, dated: 28/06/1.)

Many guardians will request and create pressure to promote their child to upper class if their child fails in the exam, otherwise students will go to another school. Complexity may be found among the teachers those will deal with the slow learners. SMC is struggling with the students of primary school, slow learners as well as drop out students (hard-to-reach) will be an extra load for them. (Interview -7, SMC president, dated: 26/06/11.)

At present, educational policies, the school environment, readiness of the teachers and current classroom practices of mainstream primary schools would work against implementing MTLA in the mainstream primary schools. Educational policy makers and implementers are not yet ready to make policies supportive of adopting MTLA in the formal schools. Program Coordinator of UNIQUE project has depicted this nicely:

There is less understanding about multi-grade concept in our country. Generally conventional system is reluctant to replicate any innovation. There is lack of skilled, knowledgeable person (teacher to manager) on NFE. As a result challenge will come during implementation. (Interview -11, PC, dated: 29.06.11)

Fixed school times and contact hours, regimented class routines and seating arrangements are also crucial challenges for implementing MTLA in mainstream primary school. School routines are the same all over the country. Classroom space is tight; bench-table based seating arrangement is a common scenario for all the primary schools, and it is difficult to move the heavy table and benches. Personnel from mainstream primary schools (HT, AT, ATEO) and the technical officer of DAM possess almost the same attitude about the challenges of
adopting MTLA with current classroom seating arrangements and practices:

*Table, chair, and bench - this tradition will make a big challenge. Face-to-face sitting arrangement with bench, chair is a big barrier to implement MTLA because flooring system is essential for implementing MTLA. Children do group work, play, sing, & others activities in the small classroom. So, for saving the time easy movement of children is essential. So, there is no scope to maintain chair-table-bench sitting arrangement. (Interview - 10, TO, dated: 28/06/11)*

However, according to the non-formal education Program Coordinator, this is not an insurmountable challenge:

*MTLA is so much flexible that it can be used in any context by considering the local needs and realities. (Interview-11, PC, dated: 29/06/11)*

**Theme 7: Strategies for Overcoming the Challenges to implementing in GPS**

HT, AT, SMC members and supervisor need to change their attitudes towards this approach and believe that it can be implemented to ensure education for hard-to-reach children. All respondents consider their role in overcoming challenges to implement MTLA in mainstream primary schools. For example, assistant teachers, head teachers, and supervisors realize they need to seek and offer help from colleagues in order to change the atmosphere for a Multi-grade classroom:

*As a child friendly moderator I will create scope for more engagement of students in teaching learning process. Being closely involved with the students, opportunities will be evolved for students to disclose their problems which will certainly be helpful to solve their problems. Discussion with colleagues and their suggestion will also be helpful for solving problems. (Interview-9, MAT, dated: 28/06/11)*

*Some teachers are responsible for MTLA while other teachers are responsible for Mono-grade teaching. I will monitor, follow*
up, give feedback and demonstrate whenever needed. To ensure the participation of slow learners I will select para teachers (temporary supplementary teacher recruited by SMC), collect community resource and make SMC more active. (Interview-4, HT, dated: 23/06/11)

Intensive support and monitoring is needed to motivate & guide the teachers’ and feedback should come reciprocally both from teachers’ and supervisors (Interview-6, ATEO, dated: 26/06/11)

Other respondents discussed the importance of reaching children that are now hard to reach, using alternative approaches to reaching these children through the primary schools:

For building digital Bangladesh, SMC will take initiatives to communicate with the Government to create scope and opportunities in every GPS School for applying alternative management to ensure education for hard-to-reach children. (Interview-7, SMC president, dated: 26/06/11)

There are some strategies identified to overcome challenges such as:

- adapting MTLA at a policy level,
- utilizing Dhaka Ahsania Mission’s experiences,
- visiting CLC by GPS teachers,
- building awareness among community people,
- making linkages between formal and non-formal primary education,
- taking initiatives to popularize this approach,
- arranging training and orientation for teachers, guardians and community members,
- forming a resource pool,
- undertaking initiatives for coordination and motivation among stakeholders,
- providing technical support to schools,
- ensuring guardians support the use of MTLA in the school, and
- raising funds from GO & NGO to overcome challenges while implementing MTLA in mainstream primary schools.
Forming a resource pool should be an important element for the implementation of MTLA:

Make resource pool with Core & TOT trainer for conducting two types of training: pedagogy and management. URC (Upazila Resource Center) can play a vital role as a technical service provider centre for training, refresher, follow-up services and TEO office can play the role of management service provider. (Interview-11, PC, dated: 29/06/11)

URC can play its role centrally for resource mobilization, motivation, advocacy for this approach by showing slides, videos, pictures on MTLA to different stakeholders”. (Interview-6, ATEO, dated: 26/06/11)

While implementing MTLA in mainstream primary school, different types of technical support will be needed, as this approach is multi-dimensional:

It is needed to maintain learners' tracking chart, competency based questioner for base assessment, grading score of learner's performance on quarterly basis. Daily monitoring, refresher training, documentation & reporting are also helpful to implement MTLA in mainstream primary schools. (Interview-10, TO, dated: 28/06/11)

Coordination among different stakeholders is another important strategy to implement MTLA in mainstream primary schools:

Coordination is unquestionably needed among HTs and trained or non trained teachers, SMC members and parents”. (Interview-5, MT, dated: 23/06/11)

Changes are required in other important areas, for instance, government’s rules-regulation linked to syllabus, non-threatening and flexible assessment system, classroom set up, contact hour, and length of instructional periods. Teachers need to change their perceptions towards traditional teaching/learning process. Instead of using only the lecture method in classrooms, they should be encouraged to apply activity based teaching-learning method. They should be motivated enough to create a learning environment supportive
for students to learn through participation, interaction and asking questions in a safe atmosphere.

Seating arrangements are the most important issue for a quality teaching/learning process. In MTLA, a flat small table along with flooring is used; however, in mainstream primary schools, bench-table is used for sitting arrangement in most cases:

Those children who are habituated by sitting on bench, suddenly he/she may not want to sit on a floor (Interview-11, PC, dated: 29/06/11)

So, what technique should be followed for organizing proper sitting arrangement?

In case of grades 1& 2, it is suitable to use mat but it does not look good if children of grades 3-5 sit on mat. We can use round folding table where 6 students can sit together. (Interview-4, HT, dated: 23/06/11)
DISCUSSIONS

These research findings support the existing literature and the developed conceptual framework regarding the strengths and challenges of implementing MTLA approach in mainstream primary schools.

Theme 1: Teaching Learning Process

The teaching learning process of MTLA is intended to be child centered. According to Vosniadou (2001), 12 principals of children’s learning should be followed while facilitating teaching-learning process in classroom. Principles include active involvement of learners, social participation, restructuring prior knowledge, and transformative learning.

From classroom observations, interviews, FGDs and field notes, MTLA in the Dhaka Ahsania Mission’s non-formal education classes follows many of these principles including encouraging active involvement of students by project and group work, identifying students’ prior knowledge, giving enough time for students’ practice, and comparing and contrasting students’ understanding while doing project work.

In each classroom, I found customized syllabus, adequate length of instructional period, honoring individual learner’s merit, promoting students’ leadership project work, co-curricular activities and the practice of giving no home work, which are favorable for ensuring learning of hard-to-reach children. Child friendly tutor and learning environment also seemed supportive for children’s’ learning. MTLA creates a very different learning environment, which is not evident in traditional primary schools. In CLCs, children stay in close contact to the tutor. They learn through group work, pair work, song, dance and play (Journal, dated: 28/06/11; time: 10.00 a.m.). In the government primary school, by contrast, they do not get sufficient scope to enjoy those activities because of the large number of students. Participatory & Child-centered learning is not followed. So, they may feel frustrated.
when they attend these schools and have trouble adapting themselves to the traditional teaching–learning process:

Children who come from CLC in mainstream GPS, they always remain silent. They cannot adjust with other students. (Interview-8, FAT, dated: 28/06/11)

Flexible timing for schooling and flexible assessment system is also considered enabling inputs for hard-to-reach children’s learning. In mainstream primary schools, the practice of summative assessment creates a fearful environment among young students. All the research participants expressed similar views to this regard. One of the mothers who participated in FGD-1 stated,

We do not want adaloti parrkkha (summative assessment) examination which is administered at end of the year. Weekly test creates demand for students’ learning. (Journal, dated: 23/06/11, time: 1.00 p.m.)

Theme 2: Implementation Strategies of MTLA

It is evident that capacity building of tutors and communities, resource mobilization, GO-NGO collaboration and a flexible delivery mode adaptable to diverse geographical contexts are favorable strategies for successful implementation of MTLA. Capacity building of the community member is a crucial component for introducing MTLA. Before the end of the project, CAG & CMC have taken initiatives for running the CLC by themselves

After being involved with DAM for a long time, we have got an idea of expenditure required to maintain a CLC. We took initiatives in advance to run the CLC by ourselves even after two years when the project will be closed. (FGD-2, dated: 26/06/11)

DAM has applied adaptive approach in order to fulfill the needs of the schools. For example, the skill training content of the lessons is meant to improve employment opportunities in the labor market. So working children prefer to learn in the CLC, expecting that they will get livelihood support in future. This adaptive approach to curriculum design is more
responsive to the context of the individual school and its local situation than the formal primary school. It appreciates the surroundings in which it intervenes (Hopkins, 2002).

Flexible timing is another example of the application of an adaptive approach. I observed two CLCs running at different times: CLC-1 runs from 8.30 to 11.30 a.m. while CLC-3 runs from 10.00 to 1.00 p.m. So, working children can join any CLC as per their needs. This flexibility in timing is also helpful for school supervision. One supervisor supervises each CLC two time full visits and one time follow up visit in a week. If all CLC run at a time then it is not possible for supervisor for supervising each CLC three times in a week (Journal, dated: 23/06/11, time: 8.00 p.m.)

Along with flexible timing, other effective strategies for implementing the MTLA approach in the NFE program for children include monitoring, supervision, training, technical support and an equivalence framework. According to Timperley (2008), integration of knowledge and skills along with multiple opportunities to learn and apply information are helpful for teachers' professional development. To create a solid base for enhanced student outcomes, teachers must integrate their knowledge and skills in connection with curriculum and assessment for effective teaching and assessing students' learning. To identify learning needs and to measure students' learning outcomes, teachers should have multiple opportunities to learn new information. Training of tutors is an especially important strategy for the implementation of MTLA since the NFE program specifically recruits women tutors with less education than regular formal primary school teachers. For example, Tutor-1 did not complete S.S.C. when she joined CLC in 2007, and Tutor-2 still has not taken the SSC exam. But after observing the CLCs, it seemed to me that the professional development of the tutors is impressive, supported by supportive supervision, monitoring. If any tutor leaves the CLC then newly recruited tutor gets support from supervisor. In refresher training,
Tutors get opportunities to learn new information and exchange their ideas. From classroom observation and interviewing Tutors, I found that tutors integrate supplementary materials such as paper cutting and matching with NCTB text books to reinforce students’ reading skills.

**Theme 3: The role of Tutors, Supervisors and Community members in implementing MTLA**

In any school using the MTLA approach, the role of the Tutor is to facilitate students’ learning, not to transmit knowledge; and the learning process is organized around individuals’ needs, not following the class size or the number of groups.). Tutors of the CLC prepared lesson plans focusing on activities and in their classes they showed how learning could take place through group activities, such as play and preparing learning materials. Tutors facilitated and participated in children’s activities, instead of controlling them.

An effective supervision mechanism is one of the most significant strategies to achieve the goals of Multi-grade teaching/learning approach. At present, schools require academic supervision and support which involve supervisors in a more developmental attitude, such as teacher training and demonstration classes. As MTLA is a multi-dimensional approach, a supervisors’ job responsibility covers a wide-range of activities. At first, he motivates the Tutors to achieve the educational goal. According to Galbraith & Michaelw (2004), motivation affects human behavior and learning powerfully. A motivational strategy is a deliberate action or process used by a trainer to enhance teachers’ motivation to learn. In Multi-grade schools, sometimes supervisors play the role of mentors. A good mentor must have patience to repeat information as needed, understand how teaching practices embody and demonstrate reflective practices for the teacher (Rowley, 1999). The data from the CLC non-formal education indicates that if any Tutor leaves the CLC, the supervisor starts
mentoring the newly recruited tutor continuously for a month, since it is not possible to impart training immediately after recruitment. In refresher training, the supervisor demonstrates teaching-learning processes to show how the tutors could implement teaching techniques in classrooms without difficulty.

To implement MTLA, community also plays an important role in increasing awareness of guardian, mobilizing resources, building linkages between GO and NGOs. They also monitor and manage the CLC. Resource mobilization is one of the important responsibilities for the community. In this connection, both CAG & CMC played a vital role, as one of the male participants of FGD-2 pointed out:

> From my childhood I wanted to be a social worker. If I call a committee I can gather fifty people at a time. I can use this technique and power to run the CLC. (FGD-2, MR, dated: 26/06/1)

**Theme 4: Challenges of Implementing MTLA in NFE Program**

At the initial stage, the CLC authorities faced a number of challenges such as lack of awareness among different stakeholders, resource mobilization, motivating the community, resource mapping, and finding a suitable place as well as renting house for CLC. In urban areas, it is very difficult to find a house in a suitable place for the CLC. There was no direct way to reach CLC-1. I went there crossing a boundary wall. Likewise, CLC-3 was situated in such a clumsy place that I could not locate the CLC though the supervisor responsible for the CLC took me to the place on the previous day. At the last moment, I was able to reach it with the help of the supervisor. The classroom was only 8 feet x 9 feet, not adequate considering the number of the learners. Within this limited space, I sat on the floor with the students to observe the teaching/learning process. I could not sit there for long because of the space limitation. After one hour, I went outside
the classroom due to my back pain. Moreover, it seemed to me that both the students and the Tutor were facing problems moving in the classroom since I was sitting on the floor between the narrow spaces of two tiny tables. Sometimes I observed the classroom while I stood beside the door, looking in. Despite this, the learning environment in the classroom was enjoyable. Students were singing a song as a whole class activity, and I realized how the children enjoy themselves in the tiny classroom! (Journal, dated: 22/06/11)

Tutors use real materials for mathematics teaching to ensure students’ learning. However, when they apply this teaching technique, they face problems in managing classrooms. Students can solve mathematical problems in written form but cannot solve the problems using real materials. Perhaps, since most of the students are working children, they learned how to count naturally from their own working context.

According to Fullan & Bennett (1990), whole School Improvement depends on Classroom Management, Instructional Strategies, Collaboration, Collegiality, Continuous Improvement, Student Engagement, Leadership, and Mobilization etc. In a multi-grade school, I also found this framework applied in order to improve the quality of CLC. In refresher training, the tutors share their innovative practices and teaching strategies in collaboration with others. Tutors, administrators and community members altogether created an ongoing learning environment. DAM builds team leadership to achieve their goal. The team leadership helps to point the way for reaching the goal where the team members collaborate to ensure effectiveness of the team (North house, 2010).

**Theme 5: Potential Advantages of Implementing MTLA in Mainstream GPS**

Bangladesh has made significant improvement in enrollment at the primary level. As a result, in many areas, more than 80 students need to get enrolled in grades 1 & 2. On the other
hand, in some schools, only 5-15 students attend grades 3-5 because the others have dropped out due to slow learning, failure to upgrade to the next level, migration, or entering the labor market. The mono-grade system clearly shows an imbalance in terms of teacher-student ratio. Whereas an overcrowded classroom for grade 1 and 2 is managed by only one teacher, a third, fourth or fifth-grade classroom having 5-15 students is also managed by single teacher. For these reasons, many students cannot achieve essential learning outcomes in Grades 1 and 2. As a result, they are promoted to the next level with poor academic achievement, which finally leads them to drop out from next level.

This is a common scenario of mono-grade primary schools. By introducing MTLA into the formal primary school, the teacher/student ratio could be balanced without extra expenditure. Slow learners, potential dropouts, and working children could benefit if MTLA is implemented in mainstream primary schools, as one tutor pointed out:

*In GPS the standard daily contact hour is 5-7 hours, whereas it is only 3 hours in multi-grade schools. As a result, working children get a chance to continue their study in MTLA managing their work. Working children do not get scope to read at home. In this system, no homework is assigned to students meaning that they complete studies when they are in school. If this approach is implemented in MPS, then working children will get an opportunity to continue their learning. (Interview-1, Tutor-1, dated: 21/06/11)*

After completing all the interviews and document reviews, I must conclude that many of the formal primary school classes (grades 1-5) have slow learners, and working children. If it were possible to manage one separate class for these children within the primary schools, then MTLA could be applied in primary schools. This initiative will create scope for education for the hard-to-reach children of Bangladesh. For example, DAM introduced remedial support for learning improvement
of 35,598 slow learners of grades 4 and 5. Among them, 5232 students attended primary terminal examination in 2010 and surprisingly 95.41% passed the exam. (Journal, dated: 30/06/11).

**Theme 6: Implementation challenges faced by the mainstream primary schools**

Based on the interviews and focus groups, it appears that mainstream primary schools would face many obstacles to implementing MTLA, which include teachers’ traditional mindset, guardians’ and students’ attitudes, SMC perception, teachers’ preparation as well as teacher-student ratio, problems related to school infrastructure, fixed school contact hours, regimented syllabus, and bench-table face-to-face seating arrangement. According to Poole (1997), teacher and students in a face-to-face classroom seating arrangement with desks is absolutely inappropriate. Also, the traditional teaching learning process (lecture) and length of class period (35-40 minutes) are other obstacles for the implementation of MTLA. Teachers are bound to apply lecture method because of the short number of contact hours, even though the school day itself is longer than in a non-formal education program for children. This is because a major portion of a period is spent checking students’ homework rather than focusing on interesting, interactive instructional activities.

A summative assessment system focusing on paper-pencil based test is a poor way to demonstrate students’ actual achievement in learning, according to the MTLA approach. In this system assessment is carried out following only structured instruction. As a result, teachers are not able to assess the multiple intelligences of students. Moreover, there is no scope for students’ assessment on the basis of extracurricular activities.
Rigidity of rules and regulations, centralized directorates, hierarchical bureaucracies and an intolerance of innovation (Malak, 2010, p. 94) are major factors which would make it difficult to implement MTLA in formal government primary schools.

**Theme 7: Strategies to Overcome Challenges to Implementing MTLA in GPS**

The results suggest some strategies which could be useful for addressing challenges in implementing MTLA in mainstream primary schools, such as motivating teachers and parents, undertaking supportive supervision and monitoring, mobilizing resources, influencing policy makers, using DAM’s experiences as a way to avoid pitfalls and false starts, giving and incorporating feedback, building awareness of stakeholders, forming a resource pool, providing technical support to teachers and communities, changing the teaching/learning process by providing training and orientation to all stakeholders, introducing the process of working collaboratively, and allocating funds for the transition to the new approach. A female assistant teacher explained her views regarding the MTLA

*I will encourage my colleagues to adopt some of the techniques of MTLA that will help them to take special care of weak students in traditional classrooms. (Interview-8, FAT, dated: 28/06/11)*

Without changing traditional teaching approaches, the assessment system will not document the full benefit of implementing MTLA. The assessment system in primary schools should be formative, giving teachers the continuous information they need to support students to achieve the competencies. We can use playgrounds for group work activities as schools lack sufficient space for carrying out these actions within the classrooms themselves. The learning environment should be free and safe, allow adequate time for
practice, and create opportunities for collaboration between teacher and students while implementing MTLA.

Teachers’ motivation is essential for the implementation of MTLA. “The daily workload of teachers, defined by their number of teaching hours and the size of classes, influences their motivation to be involved in improvement initiatives” (Reezigt & Creemers, 2005, p.412). So, one strategy for slowly transitioning MTLA into formal primary schools is to help teachers start implementing MTLA by training them to build students’ leadership, organizing student group work, and initiating project work, which will engage the students on their own and reduce the teachers’ workload during classes. However, this does require giving teachers enough paid preparation time before classes so that they can plan the activities and materials that will keep student groups busy and engaged during class time.

Supportive supervision and flexible planning are vital for this kind of learning approach. This will require supervisors in formal primary schools, however, to provide intensive support with feedback about teachers’ teaching, not just checking on whether the teachers are filling out paperwork correctly. According to Rogers (2002, p.98), “Feedback is an essential part of the process of learning, not separate from it”.

Finally, my data demonstrates that many of the strategies used in other countries to make MTLA work within the primary school system are not in use in Bangladesh, at least as I observed in the formal government primary schools I have visited. These include the use of technologies such as one-way radio, two-way radio (Ghana & Colombia); low power radio stations which are being applied in Multi-grade schools (Australia); mobile Multi-grade schools (Sudan); and piloting and adapting of the MTLA approach in small numbers of schools (Egypt and Sri Lanka). All of these elements might be useful for adapting and implementing MTLA in Bangladesh.
CONCLUSION

As I work in the mainstream formal government primary education sector, I am aware that a large number of children are out of school. Moreover, many students leave school before completing grade 5. These circumstances influenced me to think about how 100 percent enrollment could be ensured in the schools. Multi-grade teaching/learning (MTLA) is a new approach in the education system of Bangladesh, and this study concludes that such an initiative could potentially be promising for getting all children into and through primary school, which would help the Government of Bangladesh reach the MDGs in education by the year 2015.

The data indicate that many of the teachers in formal government primary schools, especially in the first and second grades, face problems while managing a large number of students. They constantly raised the point that they cannot apply a participatory teaching/learning process because of high teacher/students’ ratio and infrastructure-related problems (such as not enough space in the classroom). Moreover, the implementation of the new education policy 2010 will require large amount of money for recruiting extra teachers and building new classrooms. Given current resources, however, it is not possible to meet all the demands reflected in the policy paper. Therefore, policy makers must search for alternative ways to implement education policy with minimum financial inputs.

The research findings indicate that, after piloting, some of these problems would be solved with minimum expenditure. This study revealed some recommendations supportive for implementing MTLA in the context of Bangladesh. As this approach is flexible, it could be adapted in the mainstream primary schools to create scope and educational opportunities for hard-to-reach children as needed, perhaps beginning by offering a separate multi-grade classroom for at-risk children right on the government primary school grounds. Then,
slowly, teachers could be trained and classrooms restructured to serve the large numbers of primary students through classrooms that are organized around students working together in small group projects with student leadership, using locally-made materials and active learning approaches.

If the policy makers come forward and take the initiative to ensure educational opportunities for hard-to-reach children, then Nasim’s dream will take shape. Bangladesh will have a good number of Nasims who would not be a burden but a resource for the country.

**Recommendations for Improving Practice**

- On the basis of the research findings about MTLA, I propose the following recommendations for implementing MTLA more broadly:
- Introduce capacity-building training on MTLA in order to strengthen competence of teachers, supervisors and SMC members.
- Create awareness among community people in order to increase their participation in children’s educational affairs.
- Train and help teachers to create self-instructional materials to generate learning interest and to meet learning needs.
- Fund pilot and model formal government primary schools and then encourage government representatives to visit these schools to build insights and understandings prior to large scale implementation of the newly devised approach across Bangladesh.
- Organize seminars, orientations, and workshops on MTLA for nation-wide advocacy of this innovative method.
- Assist the PTI curriculum (Primary Training Institute) to integrate the principles of MTLA in order to enable large number of teachers to build MTLA teaching competencies.
Recommendations for Further Research

This study did not reveal all aspects, challenges or strategies related to Multi-grade Teaching Learning Approach. As the concept MTLA is quite new in Bangladesh, more research on this area is needed in order to overcome the challenges of implementing MTLA and to explore its scope and opportunities for creating educational provisions for hard-to-reach children in mainstream primary education system. Moreover, other issues arising from this study require further investigation. The Government of Bangladesh should give adequate emphasis to research in this area, so that the research findings can be used to minimize potential gaps in ensuring 100 percent enrollment in and completion of primary education. Further research on integrating MTLA into schools should study how to reach a larger sample of schools and stakeholders in order to generate in-depth understanding regarding the possibilities of introducing MTLA across the country.
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