Improving Non-Cognitive Skills of Learners: A Priority in Post War School Contexts

Manjula Vithanapathirana[1*]

ABSTRACT. In a post war context of school education two main challenges faced in achieving effective leaning outcomes are the shortages of teachers and the issues related to student non-cognitive skills. Non-cognitive skills are also referred to as soft skills or personal skills such as interpersonal skills, motivation, ethical behaviour, team work, critical thinking, coping, innovation etc. In schools where teacher shortages exists student learning lag mainly due to increased student idle time. Student enthusiasm towards learning is also low due to issues of war and deprivation. If students are neglected due to lack of teachers, their learning as well as personality development are adversely affected. Low achievement and behaviour problems are common in deprived school contexts. This paper suggests adopting multigrade teaching strategies to overcome these challenges. Multigrade teaching is a teaching arrangement where a single teacher simultaneously instructs students of more than one grade in the same class. There are significant benefits reported from worldwide research on multigrade teaching and most significant is the potential it has in improving non-cognitive skills of learners. Non-cognitive skills are developed in contexts of collaboration and support from colleagues, facilitators and supportive others. There is also evidence to indicate that if multigrade teaching is adopted systematically, the learner cognitive outcomes are equivalent to that of monograde settings. In considering learning in post war school contexts multigrade teaching is a suitable model. The existing research and recommendations are presented.

Key words: Non-Cognitive Skills, Multigrade Teaching, Effective Learning, Soft Skills, Teacher Shortages, Low Achievement.

* To whom correspondence should be addressed : vibhasini@gmail.com
[1] Department of Educational Psychology,Faculty of Education, University of Colombo Sri Lanka