STRATEGIES TO REDUCE REPETITION IN CAMEROON PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Repetition is one indicator of the internal inefficiency of an educational system. In Cameroon, primary school repetition is high (40%) and as such, constitutes wastage particularly, and of course problematic to the state, parents and individual pupils/victims. It is conceptualized that efficiency as applied to educational achievement combines both qualitative and quantitative variables and relates inputs to outputs. An efficient educational system should enable students graduate within the time frame prescribed. If students spend more time than is required there is wastage.

To combat this phenomenon in the primary school system in Cameroon, the government has resorted to experiment on some strategies namely: Compensatory Education, Competency-Based Teaching Approach, Automatic/ Administrative Promotion in addition to the New Pedagogic Approach with apparently, significant results in the reduction of repeating. It is concluded that these strategies based on a pupil-centred philosophy/pedagogy tend to promote learning and consequently, increase promotion in primary schools.

INTRODUCTION

The "Universalisation of Primary Education" or "Education for All" is a major policy option in the educational system of Cameroon. The 1996 constitution provides that "Primary Education shall be Compulsory"; on the eve of 11 February, 2000 the President of the Republic reiterated this policy and declared primary education "Obligatory" and "Free". In spite of these good intentions there is hardly any instrument (legal punishment) that compels parents to respect these declarations. More important is the fact that the school system continues to suffer from inefficiency witnessed in the repetition of classes, poor pass rates in official examinations with large differences in performance between urban and rural schools. Indeed, many studies (UNICEF, 2001; Amin M.E. 1999) reveal high repeating rates (more than 40%) at the level of primary schools in Cameroon.

To confront this problem the government of Cameroon through the former Ministry of National Education initiated with the assistance of the African Development Bank, the Education project II. This project had as a main objective, to experiment on the reduction of repetition to about 10% through the introduction of compensatory or remedial education, competency-based teaching and automatic promotion in some selected primary schools in the country. It was envisaged that should the experiment attain its objective, compensatory education, competency-based teaching and automatic promotion will be generalized to all primary schools in the country as a measure to reduce repetition.

THE PROBLEM OF REPETITION

The Cameroon system of education is currently in a phase of profound reform at the level of primary education. Among the reform objectives is the desire to ameliorate the efficiency of the system through an improvement of internal output; that is, increasing the rate of promotion to superior classes, a reduction in repeater rates the reduction in the gap that exists between urban and rural schools in terms of performance.

It is observed that repetition is high (40%) in primary schools in Cameroon indicating inefficiency in terms of cost and wastage. Results of tests administered

within the framework of the Education project II in November 2002 revealed the primary school very weak with an overall average of 5/20. Repeating a class increases private and public costs of education shouldered by individual parents and the state. It also leads to large classes with attendant problems of assessment and supervision of students; more facilities are needed by the construction and equiping of new classrooms, training and recruiting more teachers as well as providing additional didactic materials. Repeating a class also delays the socio-economic integration of youths in the productive system of a nation and consequently, slows down economic and social development.

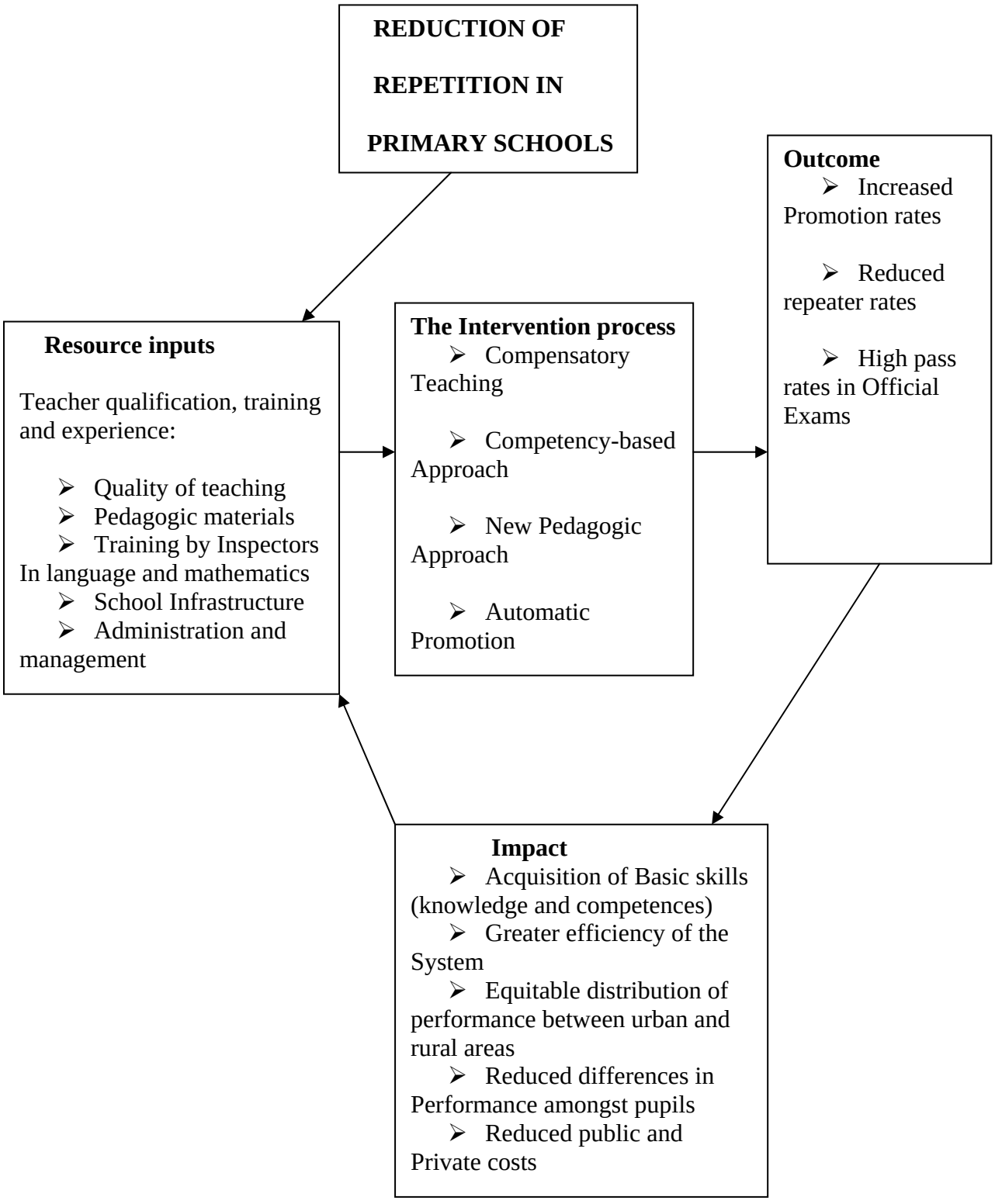
The psychological impact of failure and repetition on the individual pupil can be destructive as the repeater (child) develops an inferiority complex and an unprogressive attitude towards peers and school. On the part of parents, failure and repeating by off-springs can lead to the development of a feeling of guilt in the non-accomplishment of their duty as primary educators.

Furthermore, the policy of repetition may tantamount to man playing God by deciding who has to advance academically/educationally/intellectually. Slow developers exist and the fact that a man of 60 years can have the I.Q. of a 10 year old does not stop him from being physically 60 years old. Intelligence develops differently between individuals and that is why there exist slow learners or late bloomers. Except there is a serious mental or physical handicap every child is capable of learning; it is a matter of time/when.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

The diagram below is a conceptual model illustrating the link between reducing repetition and the efficiency of an educational system. It is conceptualized that reducing repeating schools depends on a number of inputs that affect the quality of the system. It is argued that the intervention processes (Compensatory teaching, Competency-based approach, the New Pedagogic Approach and Automatic promotion) in the context of reform at the level of primary schools will reduce repeating. It is also postulated that these processes will determine the outcome (greater efficiency) and consequently, the anticipated impact.

Fig I: Conceptual Model Explaining the Linkages of the Variables Leading to Reduction of Repetition in Primary Schools



EDUCATIONAL EFFICIENCY

A major problem in primary schools in developing countries is educational wastage. This results from failure to manage the educational system in a manner that enables students and pupils to complete their education within the time frame prescribed by the syllabus. Dennison S.R.(1984) states that "*In spite of the disparagement from many quarters , performance in public examinations is still the most reliable indicator of success or failures of schools in their primary function of educating children in the elements of literacy, numeracy and some knowledge and understanding of our intellectual heritage"* The concept of efficiency as applied to educational achievements combines both qualitative and quantitative variables and relates inputs to outputs. To the financial input must be added the manpower of administrators and teachers, buildings and educational materials and of course, pupils. The output of an educational system is mainly, concerned with the cognitive achievements and attitudes of the same pupils some years later. One indicator of internal efficiency according to Mark Bray(1981) is the '*progress rate through the system'*. A second indicator is provided by "*the success rate in final examinations"*. These are fairly, easy to determine though more difficult to evaluate. In addition to cognitive achievements, it has been discovered that non-cognitive developments are also important in assessing school efficiency and even more difficult to assess.

In practical terms, the problem of educational efficiency has two internal dimensions: the flow of students through the system (with minimum waste) and the quality of learning achieved in the system. Wastage in the flow of students is manifested quantitatively in the form of dropouts and repetitions while the quality of learning is determined by the inputs of the educational system (Bray,M.1981). The second part of educational efficiency, the quality of learning and its trade-offs with the quantitative aspects, is much more controversial and ambiguous. A major problem in primary schools in developing countries is educational wastage resulting from failure to manage the educational system such that it enables students to complete school within the time frame prescribed by the syllabus. An efficient educational system should enable students to graduate within the standard frame. If students spend more than the time normally required there is wastage in the educational system

(Chantanavich et al, 1990, p.16). An index of educational wastage or the wastage ratio can be estimated between input and actual output i.e: the number of years a pupil spends in primary school relative to the ideal or expected number of years to graduate. The input is measured in terms of human resources, infrastructure, training teaching and learning processes.

In reality, no educational system is 100per cent efficient as there are always failures and dropouts. This does not mean that things should be left as they are; otherwise there will exist unchecked economic, social and psychological costs detrimental to the development of a nation. There are many ways to measure the efficiency of an educational system. Measurement models range from primitive to very sophisticated (ibid). A primitive model for example, will indicate the ratio between the number of pupils in class and the number of pupils who graduated 6 or 7 years later. The more sophisticated true cohort models study one particular group of students, following them over a long period through each phase of school and computing the proportion of promotions failures and dropout for each class.

REPETITION

The phenomenon of high repeating is experienced in many third world countries. Repeating a class is an indicator of the inefficiency of the educational system (Amin, 1999). In some of these countries pupils are given the opportunity to repeat one or two times at the primary school level(Robinson et al, 1992). Compared to other approaches, this is a severe measure for selection at the primary school level. France for example, uses the approach whereby, a child may repeat once throughout his school life, while other countries allow a second repeat (ibid). In Cameroon, it is the second option which prevails. As a matter of fact, the decision to repeat is not always a policy option but an option, which depends on the discretion of schools and parents (UNICEF; Programme d'Education de Base, 2001). Whatever be the case, repeating as a policy option is intended to improve individual performance. In Cameroon, it is observed that there exist differential repetition and completion rates in the Anglophone and Francophone provinces as well as between urban and rural areas (Amin, ibid). For example, the average repeater rate for terminal examination between

1985 and 1990 was about 37.6per cent for the francophone system and 8.5per cent for the Anglophone system during the same period.

COMPENSATORY TEACHING

Many measures are put in place to reduce repeating or improve internal efficiency of an educational system. Some countries have opted to suppress repeating while others manipulate directly, the inputs (and process) of the system to achieve the same objectives. (MINEDUC: Education Project II; 2001) . These inputs are for example:

- Training of more qualified teachers;
- Use of more efficient teaching methods (The New Pedagogic Approach (NPA), Compensatory Education and Competency Based Education in the case of Cameroon);
- Facilitation of access to school materials and other training materials to the largest number of pupils;
- Amelioration of the conditions of learning and teaching.

In view of the above, Cameroon has chosen to experiment on the amelioration/manipulation of all the above inputs to reduce repeating as observed through the experiment on compensatory education within the framework of the Education Project II.

Compensatory education is not a totally new approach. In 1904, the Minister of Public Education in Paris, asked a commission that included Alfred Binet (Inventor of famous Binet Intelligence Test) to find a way to identify subnormal children (mental orthopaedics) in the public schools in order that they may receive remedial/compensatory education (Good, 1974; p. 71). According to Binet (ibid p.70), children's intellectual performance increase with age. Raymond B Cattell (ibid, p. 62) suggests that intelligence is a continuum ranging gradually from native or "fluid" intelligence at one end to acquired or "crystallized"" intelligence at the other. Fluid intelligence corresponds to genetic potential while crystallized intelligence is akin to knowledge from the surrounding environment. Many psychologists today lean towards Cattell's view because it helps to explain how

heredity and environment co-operate to produce the individual's overall mental abilities.

There are some children whose mental faculties develop slower than others "the bright late developers" (Roth, I. 1990). Furthermore, Skinner B.F. believes that Children are more likely to learn if they are encouraged or rewarded for the right kind of behaviour (Roth, I; Op.cit). This is based on his theory of motivation and its impact on learning. The developmental psychologist Jean Piaget (Roth, I. Ibid) has done much to promote the view that children will only learn when they are ready. According to Piaget, when children's mental faculties have reached a certain stage of maturity, they will discover things themselves. As a result of this insight, teachers these days are much less likely to impose rigid learning regimes on their pupils. Instead, teaching is tuned to the needs of individual children as prescribed in the New Pedagogic Approach (NPA) already operational in Cameroon primary schools.

All of the above indicate that children differ in intelligence and learning processes and as such, the need for and the possibilities of an institutionalized system of compensatory/remedial education and competency-based approach in the process of learning. Considering that children do not learn at the same pace, children demonstrate characteristics which label them as either (1) underachievers, (2) slow learners or in more appropriate terms, (3) children at risk (Eggen & Kauchack 1992, p. 178). The following are the main points that tend to explain this inadequacy.

- ❖ They are lowly motivated;
- ❖ They have low self esteem;
- ❖ They are dissatisfied with their school environment;
- ❖ Their attendance at school is poor;
- ❖ Their home background situation is troublesome:
- ❖ Some of the children have experience with drugs (alcohol, cigarettes etc)
- ❖ They score low marks in tests and examinations;
- ❖ They tend to be transient (not focused) on task;
- ❖ They do not respect school regulations.

Formally, remedial/compensatory education does not exist in the school system of Cameroon. What obtains are private evening classes organised and mainly promoted by parents and private home teachers to arrest some academic shortcomings of pupils or prepare them for official examinations. Compensatory education within the context of Education Project II refers to any supplementary teaching outside the official school time (MINEDUC, Education Project II, 2001). Generally, in this approach there is an adjustment of the learning programme to the capacity of the learner (Good and Brosphy, 1978). It is the active participation of the learner, which is primordial in compensatory education.

The opportunity, facility and the time spent to learn are the important determinants of what is really learnt. The strategies in compensatory/remedial education proposed by Biehler and Snowman (1986) from the studies of Block and Anderson (1995) are as follows:

- Group work
- Individual teaching
- Material for extra and further teaching
- Provision for alternative material
- Re-teaching and re-education

All these strategies have as principal objectives, the amelioration of understanding and enhancement of the learning capacity of each child.

COMPETENCY – BASED APPROACH

Competency-based approach is teaching on the basis of competencies defined in advance with respect to existing programmes and the requirements of a general system of evaluation and certification. Broadly speaking, a competence is a manner of reacting efficiently and effectively in a complex situation using elementary knowledge ‘Perrenoud P.: Construire des Compétences dès l’école, ESF; (1997), in Aider les Eleves d’Apprendre, G de Vecchi; Hachette (2000). It is a coordinated group of knowledge, know-how and skill displayed in a given situation. The mastery of a competence necessitates therefore, the acquisition of these knowledge and know-how. In consequence, its integration consists of acquiring a group of knowledge from

learning situations relying on problem solving activities as envisaged in the New Pedagogic Approach (NPA).

THE NEW PEDAGOGIC APPROACH

The 1995 National Forum on Education in Cameroon, revealed severe mediocrity in the educational output of primary school children. Consequently, it sought to give a new vision to the entire system of education.. The determination of the government to redynamise the educational became manifest in the promulgation on 14th April 1998, of the law on educational orientation. With the assistance of Projet d'Appui au Système Educatif Camerounais (PASECA), new teaching programmes have been introduced in Teacher Training Colleges (ENIEG), as well as Francophone and Anglophone primary schools conceived by the Inspector General for Pedagogy for Primary, Nursery and Teacher Education (IGP/PNTE). The 1998 Education law prescribed as a new mission/vision for Cameroonians schools, the training of children in view of their intellectual, physical, civic and moral welfare as well as their integration into the society taking into consideration the economic, socio-cultural, political and moral factors. Efforts and reflections in this direction led to the birth of a new pedagogic process- the New Pedagogic Approach (MINEDUC; NAP; 2002 p.4). This approach is revealed as a powerful means of improving quality of the education and school output.

The New Pedagogic Approach can be defined as a process, which places the child at the center of teaching/learning by appealing to his reasoning within the framework of classroom problem-solving situation. It is a method based on the development of inferential thinking. It recommends the use of teaching techniques that require exercises and thus, the development of thinking at all levels. These techniques enables the child to pass from simple identification exercises of memorization, recalling and /or application to a higher level of intellectual activity. In this manner he will acquire the ability to criticize, propose opinions, imagine, create, discover solutions to more or less complex problems. Such problems will normally require him to use his thinking, memory, understanding, application, analysis and evaluation system faculties (MINEDUC; ibid, p.11). This process, combined with compensatory education and competency-based approach, is believed will enhance efficiency in the educational system.

THE IMPACT OF COMPENSATORY AND COMPETENCY-BASED TEACHING:

In the pilot experiment to curb the high rate of repetition of classes by primary school pupils two teaching strategies were used from class 2 to class 6 for the teaching and learning of language (English and French) and Mathematics. These were compensatory teaching and the competency-based approach combined with automatic promotion and the New Pedagogic Approach.

PROMOTION

Promotion (that is passing/progressing from one level of class to another) is a component of education, which is largely based on formative and summative evaluation (UNICEF; 2001). Formative evaluation is more integrated in the process of Teaching/learning mainly concerned with feedback while summative evaluation is concerned with overall attainment of educational objectives. Automatic, administrative or collective promotion, which seems to be a major strategy for the reduction of repeating (UNICEF; 2001) makes particular reference to the objective of action. That is to say, the main actions must have as principal objective, the amelioration of the level of learning capacity and comprehension (in the case of compensatory education and competency-based approach, which focus on language and mathematics) in children in order to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge. Indeed, whatever strategy is applied in promotion (administrative/pedagogic or both) the overriding concern is the amelioration of the level of thinking of the children and consequently their performances. This strategy (based on the amelioration of the quality of education) is considered the only justification for collective promotion of pupils from one class to another. The permanent support of learning by a system of continuous follow-up as well as continuous assessment and compensatory/remedial education should bring an additional value to such a system of promotion. In the pilot experiment to reduce class repetition in Cameroon, overall promotion rates in the experimental schools were significantly higher than those in the control schools after the experiment(MINEDUC/ADB; 2004). At the level of classes, those that were subjected to compensatory and competency based teaching were promoted more significantly than those in the control classes. Class promotion rates rose from about 60% to about 75% in the experimental schools.

AUTOMATIC/ADMINISTRATIVE PROMOTION

This promotion cannot be based on performance but rather a policy upon which children change from an inferior class to a superior class irrespective of the child's average score. In Cameroon, the primary school system is divided into three cycles:

Class I and II	form cycle I
Class III and IV	form cycle II
Class V and VI (VII for Anglophone system)	form cycle III

This division into cycles is based on the fact that the curriculum of each cycle is similar and connected. Automatic promotion is conceived to be within a cycle. That is, from class I to II, class III to IV, or class V to VI or VII and not class II to III or IV to V since later promotion require changing the cycle. Weak pupils who are automatically promoted are given remedial/compensatory education to reduce deficiencies in preparation for promotion (through normal examinations) to next cycle. Repeating is thus significantly reduced because the number of promotion examinations is reduced to three: from cycle I to cycle II, from cycle II to cycle III and the end of course examination. For example, the pilot experiment on the reduction of class repetition in Cameroon showed that combining automatic promotion, compensatory education and competency-based teaching had a positive effect on performance.

Table I: General effect to automatic promotion on Performance.

Passage to higher class	Promoted to current class automatically, scoring less than 10/20	Promoted to current class by scoring above 10/20	Total
Failed	333 (57%)	132 (26.2%)	608 (55.9%)
Passed	250 (43%)	372 (73.8%)	49 (44.07%)
Total	583	504	1087

The above table shows that in general, combining automatic promotion, compensatory education and the competency-based approach produces a success rate of 43% among those who were automatically promoted. This means that, of a total of *583* pupils who were promoted automatically 250 (43%) could make it to the next cycle while 57% failed.

CYCLE BY CYCLE ANALYSIS OF AUTOMATIC PROMOTION

Automatic Promotion in Cycle I

The table below illustrates the performance of pupils who were promoted

automatically from class I to class 2 and received compensatory education in preparation for cycle Il. The table further shows how many of these automatically promoted children to class 2 got promoted by passing the promotion examination to class 3.

Table II: Automatic Promotion to class 2 and Promotion to class 3

Passage to higher class	Promoted to current class automatic, scoring less than 10/20	Promoted to current class by scoring above 10/20	Total
Failed	63 (49%)	30 (30%)	93
Passed	65 (51%)	71 (70%)	136
Total	128	101	229

The above table shows that 51% of those who benefited from automatic promotion from class 1 to class 2 passed the promotion examination to class 3.

Automatic Promotion in Cycle II

The table below shows performance of pupils who were promoted automatically from class 3 to class 4 and received compensatory education in preparation for promotion for examination to class 5.

Table III: Automatic Promotion to class 4 and Promotion to class 5

Passage to higher class	Promoted to current class automatic, scoring less than 10/20	Promoted to current class by scoring above 10/20	Total
Failed	133 (62%)	35 (20%)	168
Passed	81 (38%)	142 (80%)	223
Total	214	177	391

The above table illustrates that 38% of pupils who were automatically promoted from class 3 to class 4 passed the change of cycle examination into Cycle III. This poor pass rate can be augmented by compensatory teaching.

Automatic Promotion in Cycle III

Table IV: Automatic Promotion to class 6 and performance in continuous assessment

Continuous assessment	End of cycle scoring less than 10/20	End of cycle scoring above 10/20	Total
Failed	131 (55%)	26 (21%)	157
Passed	107 (45%)	100 (79%)	207
Total	238	126	364

The table above illustrates that only 45% of pupils who were promoted automatically from class 5 to class 6 and received compensatory education and competency-based teaching passed in the continuous assessment test.

In conclusion it was realised that automatic promotion is most successful in the first cycle (51%) followed by the third (45%) and lastly, by the second cycle (38%). This was attributed to the fact that mainly female and experienced teachers are found in the first cycle and the more qualified and efficient teachers were in the third cycle for the preparation of official examinations.

PASS RATES IN OFFICIAL EXAMINATIONS

At the primary school level, official examinations are those examinations organised at the level of the Ministry of Basic for both the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) and the Government Common Entrance Examinations into secondary school (CE). The FSLC is an end of course examination while the CE is a competitive examination. Passing the CE allows the pupil to pass into secondary education while passing the FSLC is an indicator of the attainment of basic skills that can permit the pupil to operate in daily life and also an indicator of the efficiency of the primary school system. With the introduction of Compensatory teaching and competency-based approach Pass rates in official examinations (FSLC and the CE) are much higher in experimental schools than in control schools. Pass rates in the FSLC increased to 80% and to about 45% for CE.

URBAN AND RURAL DICHOTOMY IN PERFORMANCE

It has been noted that school located in urban areas in Cameroon tend to perform better than schools located in rural areas(Amin, 1999). Usually this is as a result of the differences in the distribution of human inputs and other resources. Equity in performance distribution in urban and rural areas would imply that the differences between teaching and learning strategies are minimized. For example, using the above strategies in the sampled experimental schools, the following results were obtained:

Pre-test scores of language and mathematics in the first year of the experiment were calculated, together with the average of the two pre-test. The post-test scores of the second year of the experiment were determined for language and mathematics. The mean of the second year post-test scores was also determined. The results by urban and rural schools are presented below.

Mean Scores for language and mathematics for rural and urban schools in first year pre-test, their average and second year pre-test

Performance pre and post-test Scores	Location of School	N	Mean	Std Deviation	t	Sig
Score in Language Pre-Test year One	Rural	32	5.669	2.478	-2.918	0.004*
	Urban	58	7.198	2.325		
Score in Mathematics Pre-Test year One	Rural	32	4.950	2.296	-1.791	0.077*
	Urban	58	5.812	2.123		
Average Pre-Test year One	Rural	32	5.309	2.330	-2.461	0.016*
	Urban	58	6.505	2.137		
Score in Language Post-Test second year	Rural	32	8.475	2.924	-2.694	0.008*
	Urban	58	10.079	2.571		
Score in Mathematics Post-Test in second year	Rural	32	8.181	2.491	-0.722	0.472*
	Urban	57	8.545	2.491		
Average score in post-test second year	Rural	32	8328	2.567	-1.972	0.049*
	Urban	57	9.351	2.230		

* *Mean significant at a=0.05*

Table V above confirms that experimental schools performed better than control schools at the end of the first year in both language and mathematics, verifying the effectiveness of compensatory teaching to the experimental classes.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of compensatory and competency-based teaching in addition to automatic promotion and the New Pedagogic Approach tend to have an impressive impact on repeating by increasing promotion rates, pass rates in FSLC and CE examinations in primary schools as well as reducing the differences in performance between urban and rural schools.

In the pilot experiment on the reduction of repetition in primary schools with emphasis on the above strategies in the teaching of mathematics and language it was realised that pupils' performance improved significantly while repetition reduced significantly and class promotions also ameliorated; pass rates in official examinations also tended to improve. In schools where automatic/administrative promotion took place, it was also realised that quite a significant number of pupils who would have repeated classes passed to superior cycles. Another headache in efficiency search is the difference in performance between urban and rural schools; through the use of compensatory teaching, competency-based approach, automatic promotion and the

New Pedagogic Approach, this difference was significantly reduced in the schools concerned.

On the whole it can be deduced from the experiment that automatic promotion is a possibility in primary schools as pupils are capable to mobilise various resources through competency-based teaching to solve daily life problems in mathematics or language. Using the pedagogy of anticipation, the pedagogy of the development of inferential thought and differential pedagogy inherent of the above processes, pupils become more assertive and autonomous. However, more research is necessary for the generalisation of these strategies particularly, in terms of the necessary inputs(human, material and financial resources).

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