

# Student achievement in composite classrooms: the influence on educational and soc...



## Title

Student achievement in composite classrooms: The influence on educational and social outcomes

## Abstract

As I started my first day of grade 3, it came to my attention that I was placed in a classroom with older children. Our teacher explained that this was new and we would be in a composite classroom this year. It has come to my attention that composite classrooms are starting to become a custom in schools, not only in Australia, but all around the world due to different reasons. As a pre-service teacher, I have begun to question the effects and effectiveness of composite classrooms and what academic and social impacts, being in a classroom with peers who may be older or younger, may have on a student's education. For this reason, my research will be conducted around composite classrooms with a focus on student achievements. I will be drawing attention on the educational and social results that appear in children who are placed in multi-age classrooms.

## Key words

- Composite
- Multi-age
- Student achievement
- Educational outcomes
- Social outcomes

## Justification of topic and research focus

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As I research my topic, I refer back to my previous data collection that I conducted which focused on factors that influenced students learning in composite classrooms. I developed themes around the reasons as to why schools may need to have composite classrooms and whether their reasons were for the children. One of the themes was *necessity*. Due to lack of funding and teachers, many schools are forced to join up different years' levels. These schools may not have a choice and in result this may affect a student's education. On the other hand, other schools have found positive results in have multi-grade classrooms and therefore, have embedded it into their school. In light of my current research and having recently done placement in a school that takes pride in composite classrooms and tried to ensure that all grades are multi-aged, I have decided to further develop my ideas and steer away from the reasons as to why schools have composite classrooms. I will be focusing on the students, as I believe that they are at the forefront of this and we must ensure that if composite classrooms are becoming the norm, we have a deep understanding and sufficient data to conclude on the the educational and social outcomes of students in composite classrooms. I want to shed light on student's academic performance in school and how their social skills are developing being in classrooms with peers who are older or younger then them.

### Research design

For my research, I will be using Mixed Mode methods which will involve collecting, studying and combining quantitative (e. g., experiments, surveys) and qualitative (e. g., focus groups, interviews) research. According to

Fillmore (2016), by mixing both quantitative and qualitative research and <https://assignbuster.com/student-achievement-in-composite-classrooms-the-influence-on-educational-and-social-outcomes/>

data, the researcher gains in breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration, while offsetting the weaknesses inherent to using each approach by itself. Moreover, one of the reasons as to why I chose to use mixed mode in my research is because I intend to use triangulation to examine my topic. Triangulation allows one to identify aspects of a phenomenon more accurately by approaching it from different vantage points using different methods and techniques (Filmore, 2016). I believe this will provide more insight into my research and allow me to delve deep into my focus.

For my quantitative data, I plan on conducting surveys with teachers. This will involve asking different teachers in composite classrooms on the academic and social development of their students. As I believe teachers have the best understanding of each student in their class, I want to recognise whether they have seen any positive or negative affects on their students due to being in composite classrooms. The survey questions will have a focus on students with different abilities in the classroom. This will include students with learning disabilities, who may require extra attention and how being in a classroom with peers who may be above their age and level can affect them academically and socially. Additionally, as I have done my placement in a school in which they endeavour to make prep to year 6 as composite classrooms, I was able to take observations of the student, primarily in year 1/2. I was able to interact with the students and see how they socially conducted themselves with their peers. I will be using these observations in my research to assist in addressing my topic.

Furthermore, for my qualitative data, I endeavour to conduct interviews. I intend to survey teachers who have worked in classrooms that have been both composite and also singular ages classrooms. I hope to get an insight into their opinion on composite classrooms and how they believe if there are any differences in the academic and social outcomes of students in multi – ages classes and single aged classrooms. On the other hand, I also want to interview teachers who have only been in a school in which they have composite classrooms and have never had the chance to work with children who are all the same age. I want to gain in insight into their thoughts on composite classrooms and if they can conclude any differences, both positive and negative, of students being in composite classrooms. Moreover, as teachers have a responsibility to their students, in my interview I also want to consider the affects that composite classrooms may have on teachers. With this in mind, teachers may feel pressured and not have the correct level of training and this may overall affect a student academically and socially. Slaton, Atwood, Shake & Hales (1997) suggests that the forced assignments for both teachers and students in composite classrooms might contribute to negative academic outcomes in some situations while Veeman (1995) contends that there is not a significance difference in the quality of instruction between models (multi-age and single grade classrooms) if the size is controlled and teachers are trained to teach through appropriate methods. With the research in mind, I believe that ensuring teachers are equipped with the correct knowledge plays a significant part in ensuring whether students are affected positively or negatively at school.

Additionally, to ensure I adhere to the correct rules and conduct in the research I will ensure the below:

- Informed consent: I will ensure that each time a method is conducted, I have consent from the participants and they are aware of what is being conducted and information about the research. I endeavour to have a sheet outlining the main points of the research. According to McLeod (2015), in order that consent be 'informed', consent forms may need to be accompanied by an information sheet for participants setting out information about the proposed study (in lay terms) along with details about the investigators and how they can be contacted.
- Debrief: After the research has been conducted, I will be open to debriefing with the participants on how their contribution will be used in the research. "The purpose of debriefing is to remove any misconceptions and anxieties that the participants have about the research and to leave them with a sense of dignity, knowledge, and a perception of time not wasted" (Harris, 1998).
- Confidentiality: every participant in the research will be kept confidential and names will not be mentioned, unless participants provide consent.
- Withdrawal: Participants will have full control over whether they wish to leave the study if they begin to feel uncomfortable. I will be explaining this to all participants and ensure that they do not feel obliged to continue. According to McLeod (2015), Participants should be able to leave a study at any time if they feel uncomfortable. They should also be allowed to withdraw their data. They should be told at

the start of the study that they have the right to withdraw. They should not have pressure placed upon them to continue if they do not want to.

### Expected outcomes/implications

By using the discussed research design, I believe this will assist in addressing my research topic, composite classrooms, by allowing me to gain an understanding from those who are at the forefront of multi-grade classrooms, students and teachers. It will allow me to have first hand information from those who spend most of their time in these environments. Additionally, as composite classrooms are starting to become common in many schools, there could be a possibility that I could be teaching in a school in which my classroom is composite. I believe conducting my research on composite classrooms and their effects will provide me with knowledge and allow me to future proof my teaching skills.

### Limitations

Some limitation that may arise during my research could include:

- Time: using a mix mode method could potentially be time consuming. As my evidence is all coming from teachers and students, who are in school. This will mean that I will need to liaise with the school and classroom teacher to allow time for me to come in and conduct my research methods and this may be difficult.
- Integration: as the data is collected alongside each other, results of one method can not be integrated in the other method (McLeod, 2015).

This may be difficult to do as I will be conducting them both in the same environment.

- Comparison: being that there are two different types of methods being used, it may become difficult to compare the results and analyse them consistently.
- Ethics: as my research revolves around students, if I want to ask students to participate in the research, I must ask for parental consent (as they are under 18 years). This may be difficult to do as a pre-service teacher because I may not have the opportunity to speak to parents and ensure they understand the research and their child's participations.

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