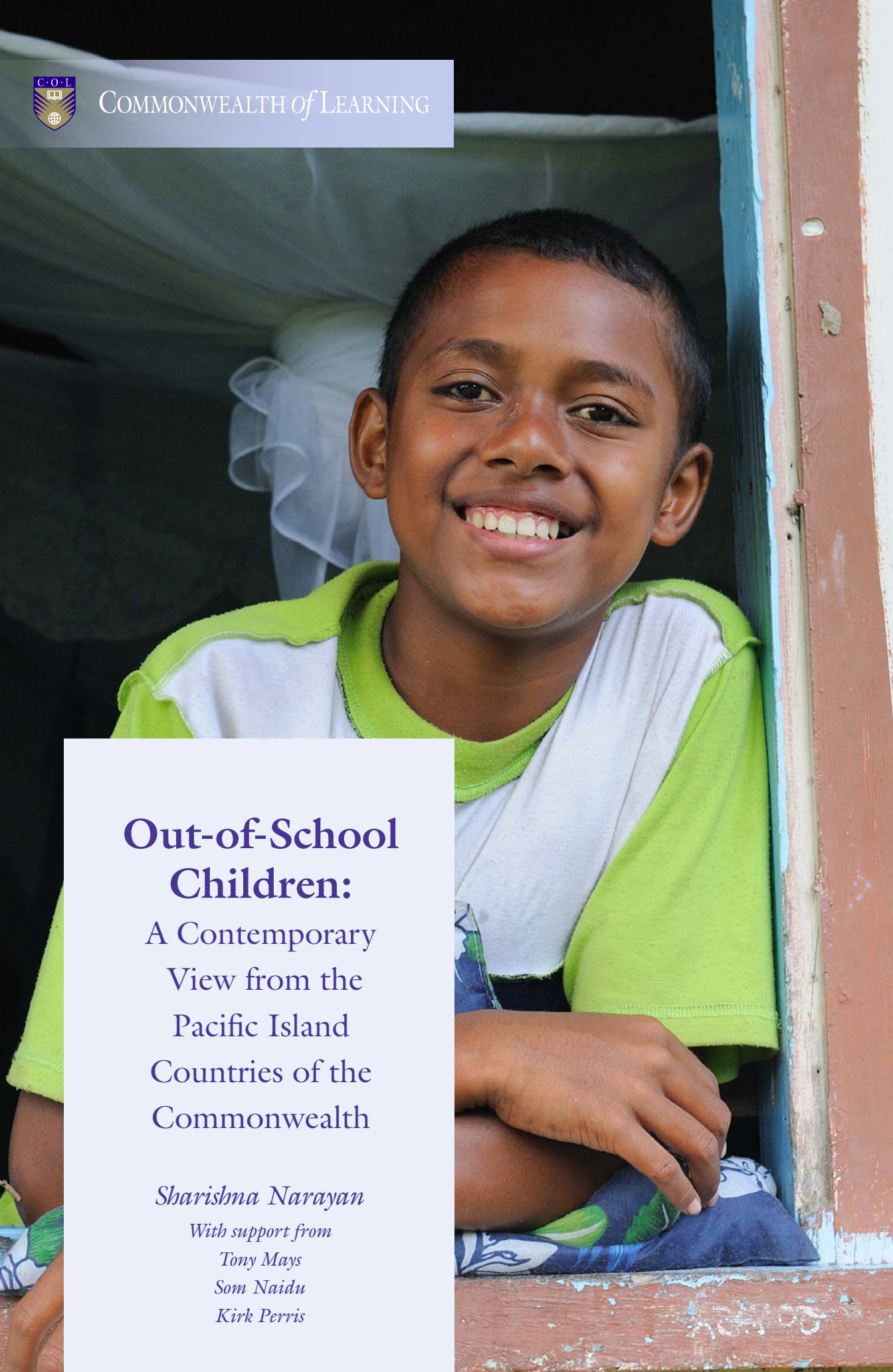

COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

Out-of-School Children:

A Contemporary View from the Pacific Island Countries of the Commonwealth

Sharishna Narayan

With support from

Tony Mays

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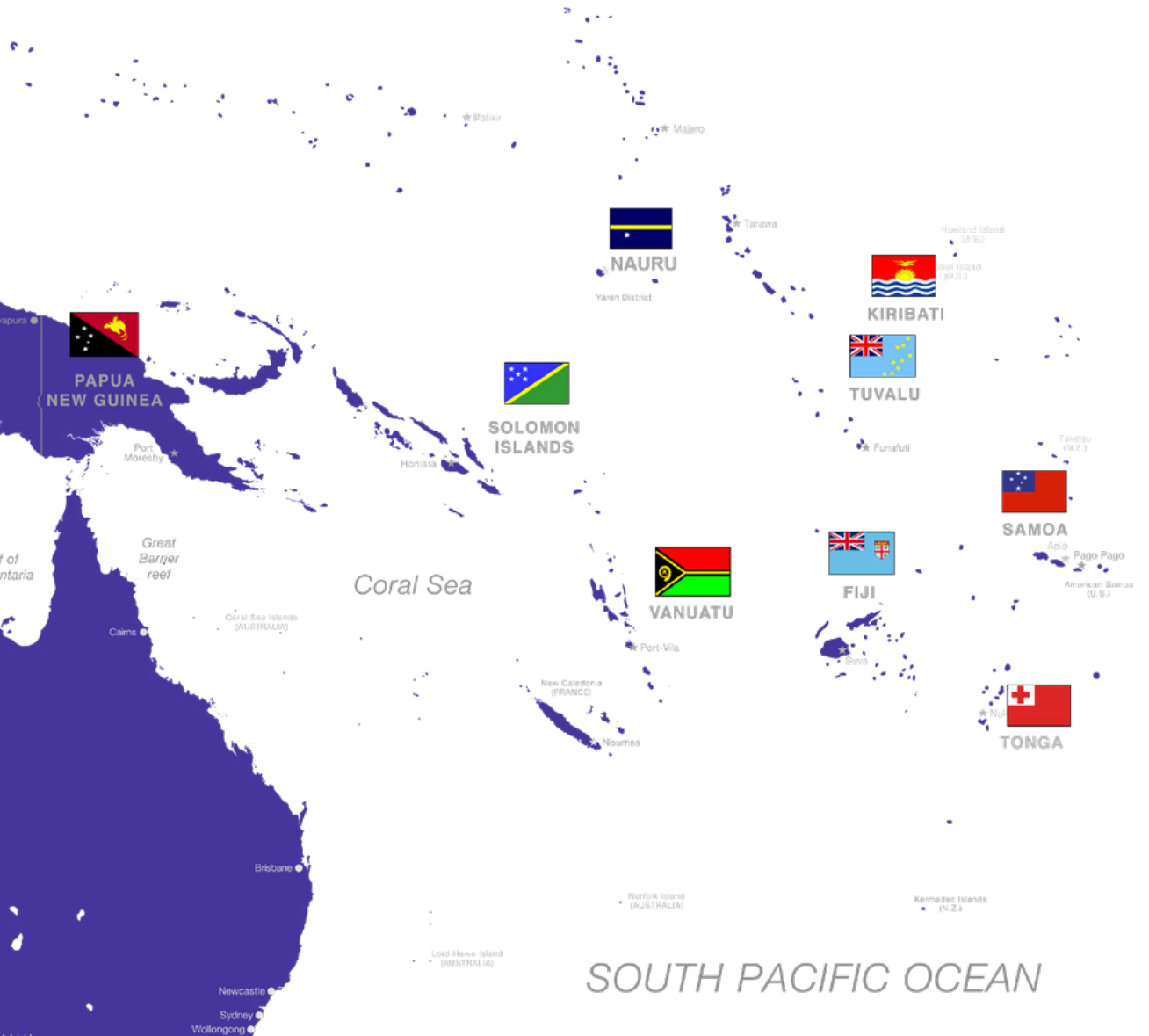
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SAMOA
Apia
Pago Pago
American Samoa (U.S.)
Great Barrier reef
Coral Sea
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Cairns
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SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN

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COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

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The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of knowledge, resources and technologies in open learning and distance education.

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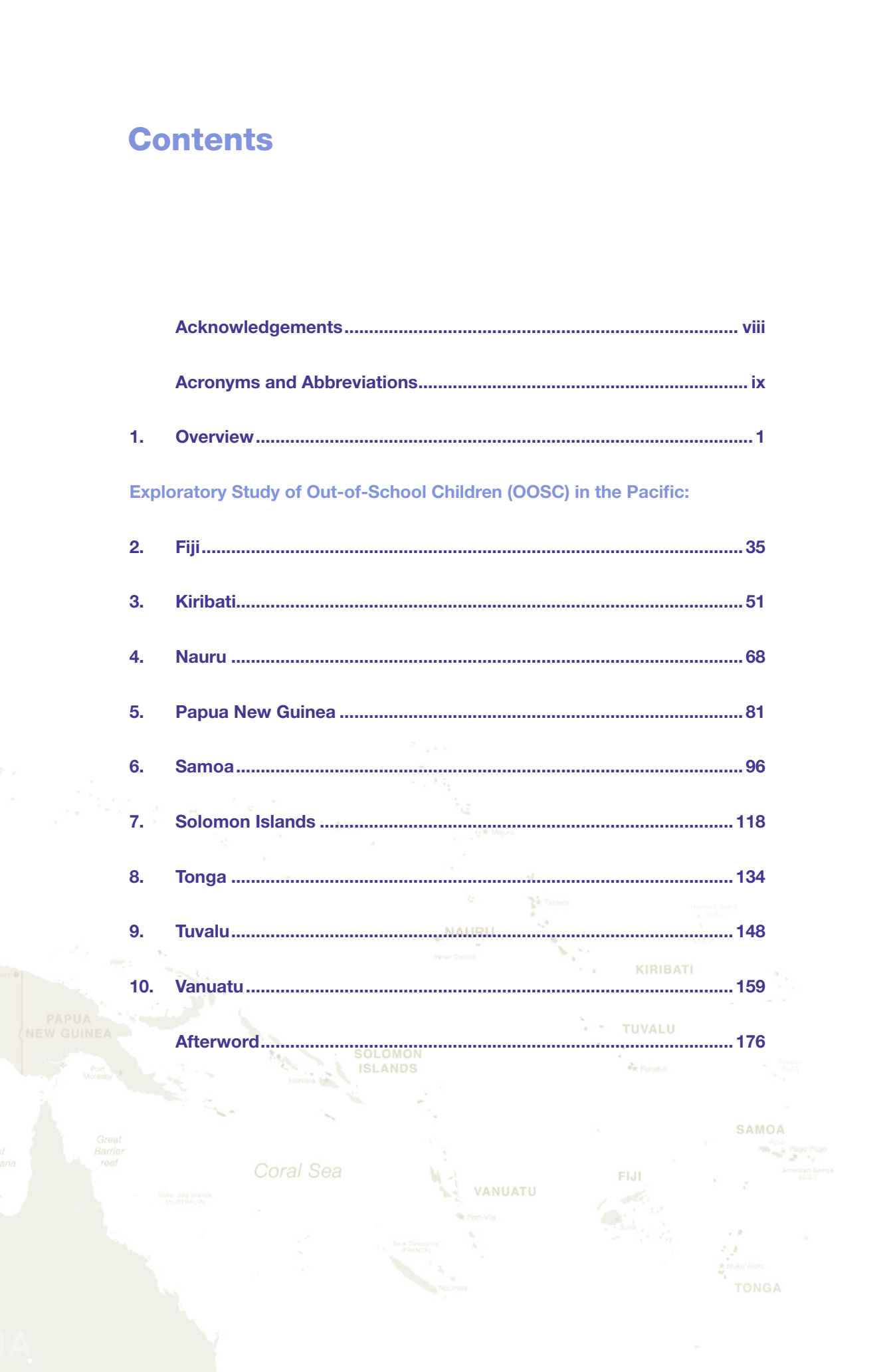

Figures

Tables

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AGE	Accelerating Girls Education
AQEP	Access to Quality Education Programme
APTC	Australia Pacific Training Coalition
CBEA	Community-Based Education Advocates
CLICC	Computer Laboratories and Internet Community Centres
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
CRPD	Conventions on the Rights of People with Disabilities
DfCDR	Department for Community Development and Religion
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management of Information Systems
EU	European Union
FEMIS	Fiji Education Management Information System
FESP	Fiji Education Sector Programme
FODE	Flexible, Open and Distance Education
GAR	Gross Attendance Ratio
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GIR	Gross Intake Rate
GPI	Gender Parity Index
ICC	Internet Community Centres
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IERC	Inclusive Education Resource Centre
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JLC	Jiwaka Literacy Centre
JSS	Junior Secondary School
KEIP	Kiribati Education Improvement Program
KIT	Kiribati Institute of Technology
KV20	Kiribati 20-Year Vision
MCI	Marist Champagnat Institute
MCSL	Marist Centre for Special Learning
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEHA	Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts
MLHRD	Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development
MOE	Ministry of Education

MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MoFT	Ministry of Finance and Training
MTC	Maritime Training Centre
NAR	Net Attendance Ratio
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
PICs	Pacific Island Countries
PR	Progression Rate
QCE	Queensland Certificate of Education
RR	Repetition Rate
RTC	Rural Training Centres
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEE	Share, Engage and Educate
SSFGS	Samoa School Fees Grant Scheme
SSLC	Samoa Secondary School Leaving Certificate
SSS	Senior Secondary School
TFF	Tuition Fee Free
TFS	Tablets for Students
TR	Transition Rate
TRBR	Telecommunications Radiocommunications and Broadcasting Regulator
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
YTC	Youth Training Centres

CHAPTER

1 Overview

Executive Summary

This report presents a study of out-of-school children (OOSC) in nine Commonwealth member states in the Pacific, referred to hereafter as Pacific Island Countries (PICs). OOSC include children of primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary school-age. They may have been unable to access formal learning for a variety of reasons such as geographic isolation, cost, work commitments or cultural factors. Others may have started formal schooling but encountered disruptions that prevented them from continuing.

The study shows that these PICs have made at least some progress in strengthening their education systems and enabling more children to enrol in school. While some have made remarkable progress in achieving universal primary education for both girls and boys, the achievements of others have been limited, with declining net enrolment rates (NER). One of the pressing concerns for many of these PICs is the issue of OOSC.

Even though most countries have made substantial investments in education to improve access to it, this study highlights that serious problems that impede equal access to education persist. Some examples include:

- inadequate access to learning facilities and a limited number of schools in rural areas,
- a lack of engaging learning materials and insufficient teaching and learning resources,
- a shortage of teachers (especially in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education),
- poor Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure and support,

- violence in schools, and
- hidden costs (e.g., clothing, books and transportation).

The PICs central to this study are also dealing with significant Internet connectivity issues that hinder the development of online learning, which could help address the challenges of OOSC. These challenges are exacerbated by other issues relating to low teacher qualifications across the PICs such as concerns about the quality of learning. Almost all the countries in this study have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities. Governments, however, are unable to adequately provide education to students with special needs. The issue of undiagnosed special needs children in the education system poses additional challenges. Natural disasters present a further barrier to attaining and sustaining universal education. The destruction of schools by natural disasters disrupts school attendance and limits online options for learning. With such calamitous events happening increasingly frequently, disaster risk reduction is one area that is gaining attention; within that area, the needs of the education sector must be prioritised.

To make education accessible to those who are not enrolled, diverse forms of delivery through various learning pathways are needed. One such pathway is open schooling. Although there are varying models, in general terms open schooling uses a range of flexible approaches to learning and teaching, based on the principles and practices of open and distance learning (ODL). Open schooling has emerged as a viable alternative to supplement and/or complement primary and secondary education and can be provided by standalone, independent distance education institutions, or universities. There are also instances of open schooling being managed as part of the education Ministry within a specific directorate. Open schooling addresses the challenges of out-of-school youth while providing quality education that may coexist and operate in unison with mainstream schooling. Both systems can work symbiotically and benefit from each other through resource sharing, best practices, etc. In this context, open schooling may be considered an approach to address equitable access to schooling. It advocates for the use of ODL as a means of delivering content, and because it exists in various forms around the world, individual countries may tailor such an intervention to match their own priorities and resources. Examples of existing models of open schooling are discussed in the Afterword.

Introduction

Children around the world share a desire to go to school. Yet millions lack the opportunity to do so. Even though more children are in school than ever before, nearly 259 million children and youth were out of school for the year ending 2018; this total includes 59 million children of primary school-age, 62 million of lower-secondary school-age and 138 million of upper-secondary school-age (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020b).

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), in its 2015 report *Out-of-School Children and Adolescents in Asia and the Pacific: Left behind on the road to learning opportunities for all*, states that the number of out-of-school children and adolescents is highest in the Asia-Pacific region. Statistics from the same report reveal that 29 per cent of the world's out-of-school children of primary school-age and 53 per cent of lower-secondary school-age adolescents are in the Asia-Pacific region. Children from poor households in rural areas and girls in general are found to be more likely to be out of school in light of the particular barriers that each group faces.

The issue of OOSC remains a significant challenge to PICs. Many of the children who do not access, or do not successfully complete, schooling add to the growing numbers of youths who are neither in employment nor in education or training. Apart from being a waste of human talent and impacting negatively on economic growth, this situation could lead to antisocial behaviour on the part of those who may feel they have no stake in society. International education-related targets, and in particular the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to provide "inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, n.d.), cannot be achieved when there are high numbers of OOSC.

Illustrating NER and GER

In 2016, Fiji had a net enrolment ratio of 96.8, meaning that 3.2 per cent of primary school-age learners were not enrolled in primary school. In the same year in Fiji, the gross enrolment ratio was 106.4 per cent. This is likely a result of learners repeating a given grade, or learners who were late to enrol in school due to varying circumstances (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020a).

Enrolment Rates in Schools in PICs

School enrolment and attendance can be used to measure educational attainment (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2016). The school net enrolment rate (NER) is defined as the number of children in the official age group for a given level of education who are enrolled in any level of education, expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020b). Based on this metric, no country can have an NER greater than 100 per cent. Gross enrolment rate (GER) represents the number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population which corresponds to the same level of education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020b). According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020b), a high GER indicates high participation of students in education while a low GER expresses a lack of access to education. Since the GER includes students of all ages (repeaters, overage students and underage students), the ratios can exceed 100 per cent (World Bank, n.d.).

The enrolment rates indicate that access to education for most children in the nine PICs has improved significantly over the past decade (see Table 1). Most of the countries have achieved near-universal enrolment for most school-aged children, at least at the primary level. Only Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Tuvalu have NERs below 90 per cent at the primary level. The participation rates at the secondary education level have lower rates across all nine countries. Only Fiji, Kiribati and Tonga have NERs of at least 70 per cent at the secondary education level, and of those, only Fiji has a secondary NER above 80 per cent.

Table 1: Enrolment Rates in Schools in PICs

	Net Enrolment Rate (NER) Primary	Net Enrolment Rate (NER) Secondary
Fiji	96.8 (2016)	83.6 (2016)
Kiribati	98.6 (2016)	77.3 (2016)
Nauru	75.9 (2015)	55.4 (2015)
Papua New Guinea	85 (2016)	16 (2016)
Samoa	94.4 (2018)	86 (2016)
Solomon Islands	92 (2016)	29 (2016)
Tonga	90 (2015)	79 (2014)
Tuvalu	84 (2016)	56 (2016)
Vanuatu	96.1 (2019)	43.2 (2019)

Source: Ministry of Education and Training (2020); Statistics for Development Division (2020); UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020c); World Bank (2020)

The above statistics show that participation in secondary education is lower than in primary education and in some countries — such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tuvalu — the difference is quite significant. There are also large variations between countries in secondary education participation levels, with the NER ranging from 16 per cent in Papua New Guinea to 83 per cent in Fiji. Data from our research of secondary sources show that various factors that are common to these countries influence enrolment in secondary education. Economic and social disadvantages and inadequate infrastructure are just some of the reasons some children miss out on education. In Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tuvalu, secondary schools do not have the physical capacity to accommodate all children who complete primary education. The associated costs of schooling, which parents and caregivers shoulder, are another barrier to primary school children continuing into secondary education.

Secondary Schooling in the Commonwealth States of the South Pacific

The proportion of young people (0–24-year-olds) in the Commonwealth States of the Pacific is approximately 50 per cent of the population, or nearly 5 million individuals (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020) (see Table 2). Relative to secondary schooling, this demographic segment reflects three groups of individuals: those

who are of secondary school-age, those who will be of secondary school-age and those who were of secondary school-age less than five years ago. Among those who are currently classified as being of secondary school-age, participation rates in secondary schooling are highly uneven.

In Papua New Guinea, for example, the Education Policy and Data Centre (EPDC) indicated that based on 2016 statistics from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, more than 80 per cent of secondary-age learners were out of school in both the lower- and upper-secondary grades. In the Solomon Islands, the corresponding figures from 2018 for out-of-school youth were over 20 per cent out of lower-secondary school and over 70 per cent out of upper-secondary school. Using 2018 data, only Kiribati and Fiji can claim to have more than 70 per cent enrolment in upper-secondary school. Based on these figures, it can be inferred that there is a need for second-chance schooling opportunities for young people who are two or more years older than the equivalent school-going age and who might benefit from an alternative curriculum offering. Although there is a potential demographic dividend for these countries, the current education environment needs greater investment, support and production if this is to be achieved. COL's Open and Innovative Schooling model is one approach being used to this end by a growing number of countries.

Table 2: Demographic Figures in the PICs

	Population (July 2020 estimates)	Proportion of 0–24-Year-Olds
Fiji	935,974	42% (396,504)
Kiribati	111,796	49% (54,457)
Nauru	11,000	42% (4,621)
Papua New Guinea	7,259,456	52% (3,764,514)
Samoa	203,774	49% (99,683)
Solomon Islands	685,097	53% (361,789)
Tonga	106,095	52% (54,802)
Tuvalu	11,342	47% (5,334)
Vanuatu	298,333	54% (160,022)
Total	9,622,867	4,901,726

Source: Central Intelligence Agency (2020)

Children with Disabilities

According to a Pacific Islands Forum article titled *Framework for Rights of Persons with Disability*, approximately 1.7 million people across all the PICs are living with a disability, which translates to 15 per cent of the total population. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia & the Pacific report titled *Disability, Livelihood and Poverty in Asia and the Pacific* notes that children with disabilities in the Pacific are more likely to miss out on educational opportunities (i.e., not

enrol) than other children and that those who do enrol are more likely to drop out of school before completing their primary education. The report highlights that people with disabilities in the Pacific are often subjected to various forms of discrimination such as unequal educational opportunities or isolation because of a lack of accommodations in educational settings. Many children are already marginalised because of gender and poverty, and a disability makes it even more difficult to access education (UNESCAP, 2012). A report by Sharma et al. titled *Addressing Barriers to Implementing Inclusive Education in the Pacific* found that poor teacher preparation, stigma, negative societal attitudes towards people with disabilities and a lack of collaboration with key stakeholders are key obstacles in implementing inclusive education in the Pacific (Sharma et al., 2019).

Many factors play a role in making a classroom inclusive and a place where children with disabilities learn alongside their non-disabled peers. Any one of these factors — or their absence — can affect inclusion and the quality of education that each child gets. Inclusive education in mainstream classrooms depends on careful planning and having the appropriate resources: adequate funding, well-trained and qualified teachers, assistive technology devices, an inclusive attitude from educators and a curriculum that can be adapted to meet the needs and limitations of a diverse group of students.

While the PICs have made some notable progress towards achieving basic enrolment, challenges related to equity still prevent children with disabilities, especially those living on the outer islands, the vulnerable and out-of-school children from fully accessing education (UNICEF Pacific Islands, n.d.). The issue of OOSC is complex and requires a multifaceted solution. The challenge is to provide equal opportunities to access quality education to those currently out of reach. The issues faced by different countries in this study are unique, and therefore require unique solutions.

Background of the Study

OOSC has been recognised as a global education crisis, particularly in the developing world. Existing data, however, are inconsistent, outdated and sourced from multiple entities. We need an updated and contemporary understanding of the learning landscape in order to best consider interventions such as COL's Open and Innovative Schooling model. This study provides that update, as it presents nine case studies that present data from each PIC on the number of out-of-school children, current and/or planned interventions and areas in which support is needed. Each case study presents results from a survey designed by COL/Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD), complemented by a summary of secondary resources. Case studies based on data from interviews with key stakeholders in four of the identified PICs are also presented.

Open schooling: A short history

The Commonwealth of Learning defines open schooling as learning that occurs outside of the confinements of a physical learning environment with the help of

Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) to bridge the gap between the learner and the educator. Learning in this case is personalised, as it takes place at the pace and rhythm of the learner with a prudent use of technology (Abrioux & Ferreira, 2009).

Open schooling originated as a response to the increasing demand for secondary education for those who had no access to schools. One of the first open school programmes in the world started as correspondence learning in Australia around 1914 at the request of parents who were living in remote and isolated areas of the country and could not send their children to boarding schools or hire a private tutor (Mukhopadhyay & Phillips, 1994). The success of this programme led to the spread of open schools in other parts of Australia. Open schools were then introduced in Canada in 1919 and in New Zealand in 1922.

Evidence from South Asia has shown that providing open education supported by the use of technology can revolutionise access to basic education and beyond (Banerji, 2015). Today, open schools have been developed in numerous countries to cater to the needs of children who are unable to attend regular primary or secondary programmes due to issues related to distance, time, financial and social family constraints and disabilities. Some examples are the National Institute of Open Schooling in India, Rural Institute of Open Schooling in Delhi, Namibian College of Open Learning, Botswana Open University Open School (formerly Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning) and Philippines Department of Education Open High School Program (OHSP) (Republic of Philippines). Other countries — for example, Mauritius, Seychelles and South Africa — have introduced different forms of open schooling to increase access to quality education in secondary schools.

Open schooling can cater to the diverse and specific learning needs of children, youth and adults in various contexts. A high degree of flexibility and openness is afforded to the learner. Open schooling can reach learners who lack access to or are unable to complete a full cycle of basic education, and it can target school dropouts and out-of-school children, youth and adults who have missed out on schooling for various reasons.

Flexibility and openness in learning are the foundations of open schooling. It can not only increase access to education but also provide equal educational opportunities to the disadvantaged and the marginalised (Tagoe, 2014).

Open schooling in the Commonwealth

COL has been promoting a model called Open and Innovative Schooling (OIS) across the Commonwealth as a flexible intervention that has proven effective in responding to the needs of a given country's context. The model is technology-oriented and focuses on the training of teachers in online learning, using open educational resources (OER), improving management of open schools and supporting the use of appropriate technologies in teaching and learning (Commonwealth of Learning, 2017). It does not prescribe a curricular focus, school level or proportion of face-to-face to online learning, etc., but leaves such decisions to the organisations using it.

Ministries of Education in Belize, Mozambique, Vanuatu and Zambia signed agreements in 2017 to integrate COL's Open and Innovative Schooling model into their education systems. In 2018, they were joined by Malawi and Trinidad & Tobago, and in July 2019, a memorandum of understanding was signed with the Universal Basic Education Commission in Nigeria. The Open and Innovative Schooling team has also been working with partners to follow up on the outcomes of COL-supported programmes through research studies and to promote peer auditing for quality assurance. Another important activity has been the strengthening of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA) (see comosa-connect.org) through increased member engagement and social media presence.

Purpose and Objectives of This Study

The purpose of this study was to provide a contemporary portrait and analysis of the OOSC context in the Pacific region. As most of the available data are out of date, and often decontextualised from the on-the-ground experience of Ministry officials and other stakeholders, the overall objectives of this study were to:

- provide an overview of the status of OOSC in the Commonwealth member countries of the Pacific,
- identify the barriers that contribute to exclusion from school education in the selected countries, and
- briefly describe the existing policies and strategies implemented by the countries to increase access to education.

This report also builds on country reports on OOSC in the Commonwealth Pacific from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The country reports present analyses and key findings as well as barriers and policy responses and interventions implemented in these countries to address the issue of OOSC.

Data gathered from this study will be particularly useful in the context of devising interventions by the member states and funders in the Pacific, along with multilateral organisations such as UNESCO and the World Bank. They may also serve other regions, especially countries located in the Caribbean that have similar experiences with OOSC. Overall, they should prove helpful to anyone interested in OOSC in general, such as NGOs, researchers, academics, etc.

Methodology

Research method

This study used a mixed-methods approach to gather data, which included reviewing secondary resources, an online survey and in-depth interviews conducted online via Zoom. Secondary sources included country reports, regional study reports, education sector programme documents, national census reports and administrative data from the nine PICs. Both the online survey and interview protocol instruments were designed to ascertain the current situation of OOSC in the Commonwealth PICs.

Research procedure

The online survey was conducted via SurveyMonkey, with a link to the survey sent to key education experts in the nine countries in this study. These individuals were contacted primarily through COL's focal points, who are designated individuals in each Commonwealth country, usually appointed by governments, to support COL's work in their country context. Among the survey participants, four who had provided consent in the survey for follow-up steps were approached by the researcher to take part in a series of Zoom interviews conducted over three weeks. The interviewed participants were chosen based on their responses to the survey and the gaps identified in the secondary data.

Research instruments

QUANTITATIVE DATA

An online survey (see Appendix 1) was designed to develop an overview of the status of OOSC in the Commonwealth Pacific, understand the factors responsible for children dropping out of school and identify strategies that could be applied to stem dropout rates. It contained 13 questions with an expected completion time of approximately 20 minutes. The survey included a variety of Likert scale items consisting of the status of OOSC in the Pacific, reasons for dropping out, strategies used to reduce school dropouts, second-chance opportunities for at-risk students, professional development opportunities for teachers and the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in education. The survey link was sent to key stakeholders from the education sector in the nine Pacific Commonwealth countries. A response rate of 100 per cent was achieved. The survey data were analysed quantitatively using Microsoft Excel software and the analysis feature of SurveyMonkey.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with educational experts — directorates of Education Departments, college administrators and national education officials — from Fiji, Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Tonga to corroborate the data gathered from the survey and secondary sources. The interviews were conducted via Zoom. The interview data supplemented and enriched the preliminary findings from other sources. The purpose of these interviews was to gather more information and corroborate existing information about OOSC in each region and to find out about OOSC-related initiatives and activities that had already been implemented. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the lead author. Data gathered from the interviews were subjected to a thematic content analysis. Descriptive analysis was performed on qualitative data collected during the interviews following the steps of identification and organisation of themes and, finally, identification and analysis of findings.

VALIDITY OF THE INSTRUMENTS

An impartial review of the survey was carried out to test its content validity with subject matter experts from the School of Social Sciences from the Faculty of Arts,

Law and Education at the University of the South Pacific, Laucala campus, before it was sent out to study participants. They were asked to look at the survey, answer the questions and provide feedback on the content of the survey, especially the face validity of the questions. The instruments were subsequently adjusted based on the faculty staff's comments.

Results and Discussion

Demographic data

Most respondents to the survey were from government departments (67 per cent, n=6), followed by personnel from public education or training institutes (22 per cent, n=2). The balance, classed as "others," worked for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (11 per cent, n=1).

State of OOSC in the Pacific

This section presents contemporary OOSC practices, with a particular focus on the gravity of the situation in the region. The first question in the survey sought to explore the seriousness of OOSC in each of the nine countries in this study (see Figure 1). The responses to the questions were based on a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated *not at all serious*, and 4 indicated *very serious*.

The data revealed that out of the nine countries, three stated that OOSC was a very serious concern in the upper-secondary school-age category, and two stated that it was a serious concern in the lower-secondary school-age category. One PIC indicated that children dropping out was a very serious concern in primary schools.

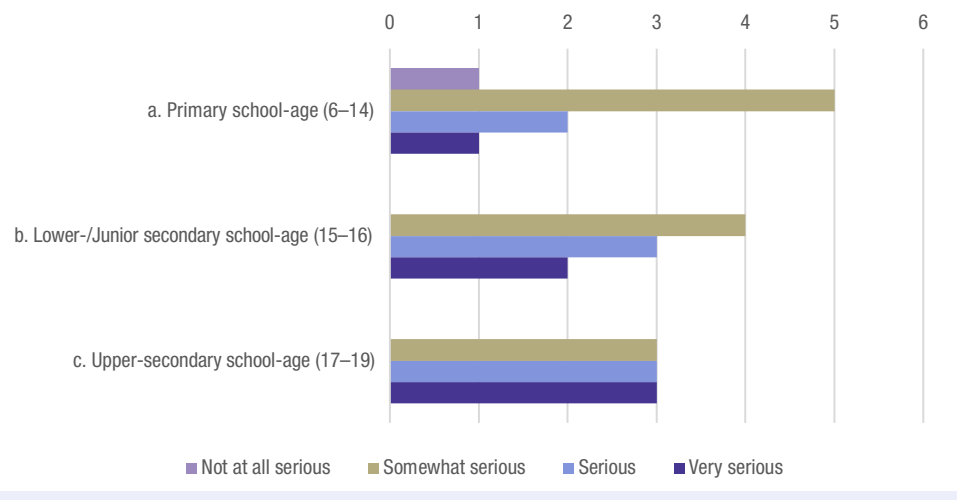

Figure 1: The Scale of the OOSC Challenge in the PICs

All the countries in the region face major challenges with children dropping out of primary, lower-secondary or upper-secondary education before the end of the last grade, or never enrolling at all in the senior levels.

The problem of OOSC seems to be particularly acute at the lower- and upper-secondary levels, rather than the primary level, for Papua New Guinea, Kiribati and Nauru. The interviews revealed that gender disparities related to participation in education also exist in Kiribati and Fiji, where a high dropout rate for boys constitutes a major problem.

Reasons for dropping out of school

Over the years, the number of children enrolled in schools has increased (UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2017d). All the countries in this study have constitutional provisions and laws mandating compulsory education from primary up to secondary level. Nonetheless, a significant number of children are not completing their primary and secondary education in PICs. They drop out of the education system for myriad reasons — for example, geographical barriers can make it difficult to reach children in dispersed and isolated areas, natural hazards, poverty, quality of schools, inadequate facilities, teacher absenteeism, teacher shortages, misperceptions about education, lack of options to access secondary education and beyond (because of, for example, lack of flexible hours of attendance, flexible curriculum choices, school fee bursaries) and, once learners have exited the system, few second-chance education opportunities (UNICEF, 2017d). Some may never enrol at all, particularly in secondary school education. While this report focuses more on dropouts, the reality is that some individuals never enrol in schooling in the first place.

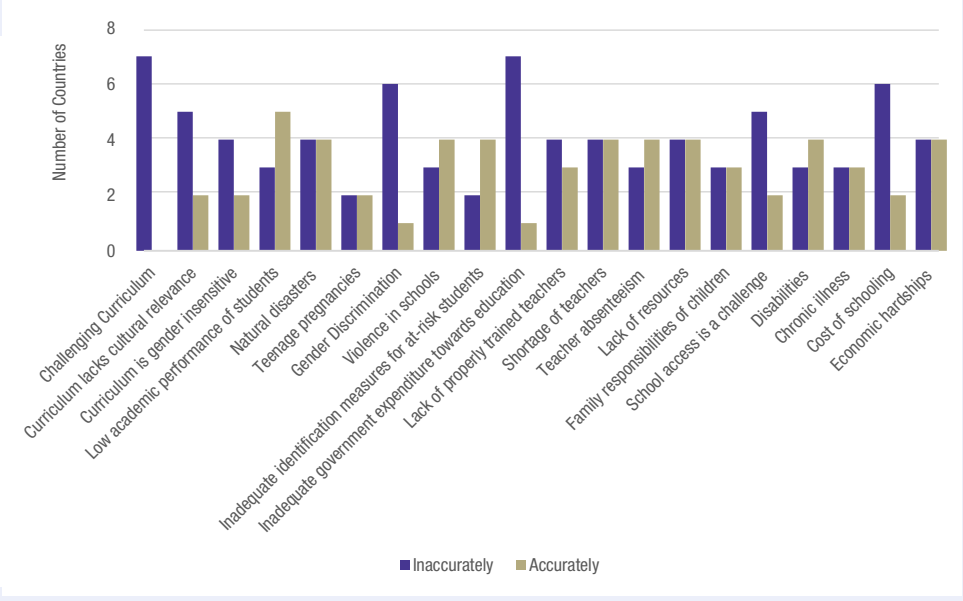

Figure 2: Reasons for Dropping Out of School

A key objective for this study was to identify the reasons children dropped out of schools in the PICs. Therefore, the respondents in the survey were presented with potential reasons and asked to respond via a 3-point Likert scale where 1 denoted *not sure*, which was treated as missing data, and 3 indicated *accurately*. *Inaccurate* means that the given reason is not considered a valid reason in a particular country. Figure 2 (above) shows an array of reasons for dropping out of school in PICs.

The survey data revealed that the major reason linked to high levels of drop-outs in the region was low academic performance of students (56 per cent); 44 per cent of the responses indicated natural disasters, violence in schools, inadequate identification measures for at-risk students, shortage of teachers, teacher absenteeism, lack of teaching and learning resources, disabilities and economic hardships faced by parents in sending their children to school. Additionally, stakeholders from Fiji and Nauru indicated that children drop out because they lose interest in school as the curriculum is too "theoretical and exam oriented."

The low demand for education in some countries can be associated with families' socio-economic situations. Children from poor and disadvantaged families are affected by the indirect costs of schooling and, according to the results of the survey, this seems to be a particularly serious concern in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. According to national legislation, in theory basic education is free in almost all the nine PICs, but in practice, families face hardships because of the indirect costs — food, uniform, books and transportation — of sending their children to school (see Table 3).

All the PICs in the study highlighted the inability of their schools to provide structured education built around the individual needs of students, especially students with disabilities, as a reason for school dropouts. The survey results, review of secondary resources and interviews all confirmed that disability is one of the main barriers to education in all nine PICs. According to the survey, four out of nine respondents (44 per cent) affirmed that disability-related factors prevented children from attending school or forced them to drop out.

School access is a major challenge in countries such as Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, as some children have to travel long distances to attend school and poor road conditions constitute a barrier to school attendance (UNICEF, 2017d). Study participants confirmed in the interviews that geographical barriers act as major determinants in accessing education and that they are amplified for girls as well as all children with disabilities. Participants further highlighted in the interviews that some children must walk for up to an hour to access their nearest school.

Natural disasters disrupt school schedules and can be exacerbated by the impact on physical infrastructure. Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga and Papua New Guinea identified their susceptibility to such events, although this is a factor to which all nine PICs are susceptible. The analysis of secondary resources confirmed that access to quality education was challenged when school infrastructure was damaged or destroyed by a disaster, or that school buildings were used as emergency evacuation centres for extended periods under such circumstances.

Table 3: Accessibility: Provision of Education in the Nine PICs of the Commonwealth

Fiji	Primary and secondary education are free and compulsory under the Tuition Fee Free Grant by the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, Fiji, 2019).
Kiribati	Primary and junior secondary education are free and compulsory (UNICEF, 2017a).
Nauru	Education, including ECE, is free and compulsory up to age 18 (UNICEF, 2017b).
Papua New Guinea	Under the Government Tuition Fee Free Subsidy (GTFS) policy, parents pay a National Education Board (NEB) approved percentage of school fees, while the government pays for the rest (64 per cent is paid by the government and 36 per cent is paid by the parents) (Department of Education, 2020).
Samoa	The School Fee Grant Scheme (SFGS) covers tuition fees for all students enrolled in primary school and those in Years 9–11 (junior secondary) (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2020).
Solomon Islands	Fee Free Basic Education from Standard 1 up to Form 3, from primary to junior secondary (UNICEF, 2017c).
Tonga	Government-sponsored schools provide free primary and secondary education in Tonga (UNICEF, 2017e).
Tuvalu	Primary education is free from ages 6 to 15. Secondary education is only available to those who can afford the fees of AUD50 per term/AUD150 per year (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Tuvalu, 2017; UNICEF, 2017f).
Vanuatu	Under Vanuatu's free education policy, a tuition fee subsidy is provided from ECE to Years 7 and 8 in government and government-assisted schools (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2018).

Within school settings, there are also issues of physical and psychological violence. A Pacific Islands Forum report titled *Framework for Rights of Persons with Disability* notes that corporal punishment, verbal abuse and harassment all affect the quality of education and can force children to drop out of schools (Pacific Islands Forum, n.d.). According to a 2018 report by UNICEF titled *Half of World's Teens Experience Peer Violence in and Around School*, peer bullying in schools is a serious problem in Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga.

Strategies to reduce dropout rates

The case studies illustrate that several policies and interventions have been implemented in the nine PICs to reduce dropout rates. With the next set of questions, we explored the existing strategies and interventions that have been or are being provided to children who are at risk of dropping out of school. The responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated *to a very small extent* and 5 indicated *to a very large extent*, and are summarised in Figure 3.

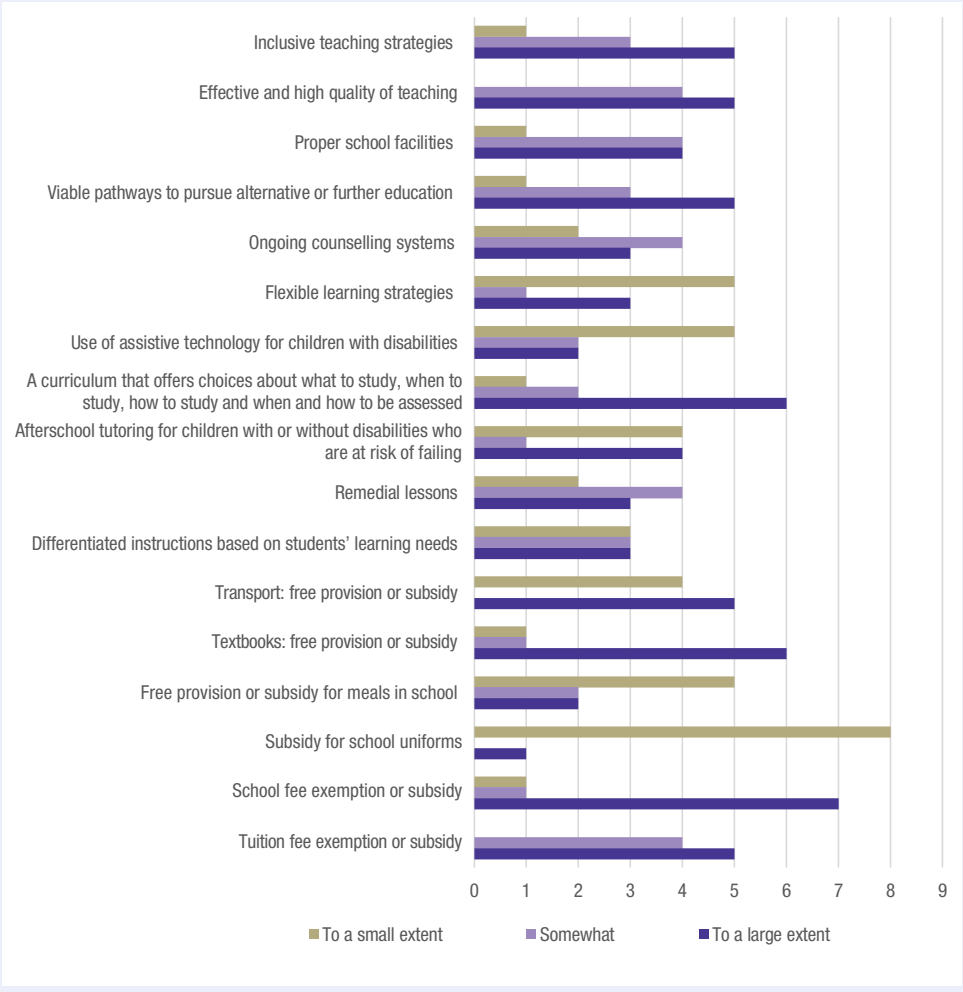

Figure 3: Strategies to Help Children Who Are Struggling

The data presented in Figure 3 indicate that the strategies used by countries to address the issue of OOSC vary across the region. More than half of the respondents (55.6 per cent, n=5) reported using inclusive teaching strategies and effective and high-quality teaching, providing viable pathways to students to pursue alternative or further education, and providing transport and tuition fee subsidies. Some countries, however, reported inadequate use of flexible learning strategies (55.6 per cent), lack of assistive technologies for children with disabilities (55.6 per cent), unaffordable cost of transportation and meals to students (55.6 per cent) or lack of subsidies for school uniforms (89 per cent) as challenges that, if mitigated, could curtail school dropout rates.

Even though government subsidies are provided for tuition and transportation in most of the PICs in the study, some still requested a contribution fee per student. For instance, in some countries, such as Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, early childhood and secondary education are not fully subsidised by the government.

Second-chance education

Second-chance education addresses the needs of individuals who dropped out of schools for a variety of reasons but still wish to complete their education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2011). Several terms have been used in the literature to describe programmes that allow individuals to re-enter the education system — for example, second-chance education programmes, alternative education programmes, re-engagement programmes and flexible learning programmes (Te Riele, 2014). These programmes are not only flexible — that is, the teaching and learning are not subject to the limitations of place, time and pace of study — but also offer a second chance to learn for a diverse group of learners regardless of age or other constraints characteristic of the traditional school system (Te Riele, 2014).

All nine PICs in the study acknowledged that the conventional education system cannot adequately and efficiently address the issue of access to education, essentially for marginalised and disadvantaged communities, and in order to expand the path to basic education for those who have either dropped out of schools or never enrolled, there is a genuine need to introduce flexible learning strategies.

The questions on this topic explored the extent to which second-chance learning opportunities or alternative pathways to education are provided to students who are, or were, unable to complete secondary education. The responses were presented using a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated *never* and 4 *always* (see Figure 4).

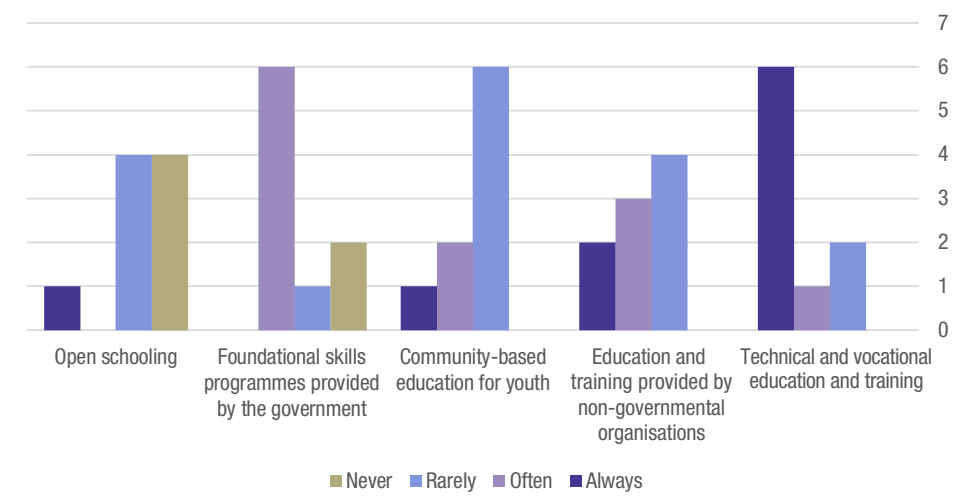

Figure 4: Second-Chance Opportunities and Alternative Pathways

The survey indicated that several second-chance opportunities are provided across the PICs to reverse or counteract dropout rates. Such opportunities are provided to those of school age who are not in schools, have never enrolled or have left prematurely without completing their basic education. A high proportion of the respondents indicated that a number of second-chance educational opportunities are always provided for children who have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping

out, such as technical and vocational education and training (TVET) (67 per cent, n=6), education and training provided by NGOs (44 per cent, n=4) or community-based education for youth (67 per cent, n=6). The survey also revealed that open schooling is rarely or never used (89 per cent, n=8) to address the issue of OOSC.

There has been an increase in awareness of the importance of providing educational and training opportunities to youth and those who have dropped out of education. In many of the nine PICs, secondary schools are still the main channels through which TVET-based training opportunities are provided to youth in the Pacific (UNESCO, 2015).

TVET is offered through vocational streams in secondary schools, and options to study for a specific career through TVET are available in schools in the Pacific from Year 10 or Year 12. Some countries have formal TVET institutions, such as the Australia Pacific Technical College (operating in all countries in the Commonwealth member states in the Pacific) and Vanuatu Institute of Technology.

Some countries are using alternative models of formal schooling to provide basic education programmes for OOSC from marginal and disadvantaged backgrounds.

SECOND-CHANCE EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED IN FIJI AND PAPUA NEW GUINEA FOR OOSC

Fiji

Matua (which means "mature" in iTaukei) operates as a bridging programme in Fiji for students who have dropped out. It enables them to return to school and complete their secondary education.

Papua New Guinea

The Flexible Open and Distance Education (FODE) programme provides an alternative pathway for students who have dropped out of schools to complete their education at their own pace and in their own time. With open access to teaching and learning resources and personnel provided by FODE, within the Department of Education, students study the national primary and secondary education curricula at home.

While some countries have made attempts to create alternative pathways to basic education for those who are at risk of dropping out or have already dropped out, such initiatives have not been successful enough to bring the most marginalised and hardest to reach back to school. In some countries, children and youth are unable to continue their schooling or to re-enter schools because of inadequate complementary or alternative learning pathways.

Teachers' professional development

There is unequivocal evidence that the quality of teaching is one of the most important determining factors of student learning outcomes and performance (Chetty et al., 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2000). The *Pacific Education for All 2015 Review* states that having a good supply of qualified and professionally trained teachers can improve both the quality of education and student learning outcomes, and in order to achieve this, professional development opportunities for teachers need to be enhanced and expanded (UNESCO, 2015).

The next survey question explored the extent to which professional development activities are provided to teachers to create effective and engaging learning environments for students. Responses were sought using a 4-point Likert scale,

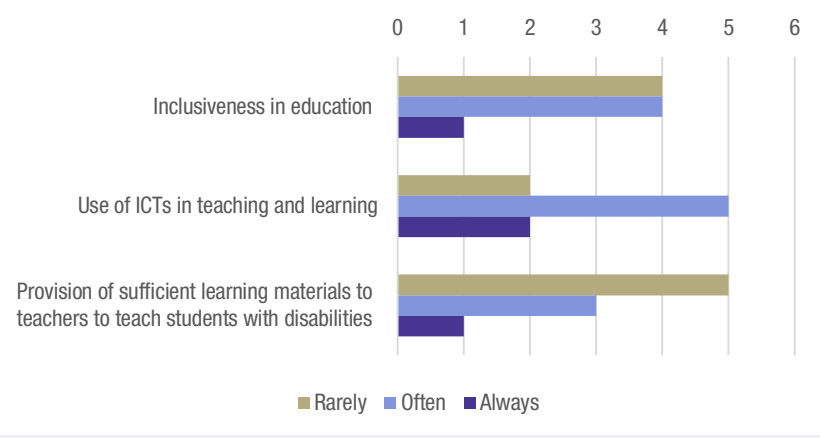

Figure 5: Teachers' Professional Development to Prevent Dropouts

where *never* was indicated by 1 and 5 indicated *always*. The responses are summarised in Figure 5.

The responses varied across the nine countries. While approximately half the countries revealed that training opportunities for educators on the use of inclusive education practices are rarely provided, the others agreed that such opportunities are often provided to teachers. Seven respondents (78 per cent) agreed that teachers are always given training on the use of ICTs in teaching and learning. Five respondents (56 per cent) stated that teachers are rarely provided with training on learning materials to teach students with disabilities.

To achieve quality education, it is imperative to train, support and value quality teachers. One problem highlighted by the analysis of secondary resources, as well as the interviews, was deficiencies in teacher quality and training in some countries. The study revealed that while more teachers are now trained and better qualified to teach in PICs than in the past, there is still a significant proportion of teachers who are untrained or uncertified to teach in some countries. For instance, according to the *Statistical Digest Report of 2016–2018* by the Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training, only 76 per cent of teachers in Vanuatu were certified to teach in 2018; teacher qualification data for the Solomon Islands in their Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development *Annual Report 2019* show that close to only 73 per cent of teachers were certified to teach or held education qualifications in 2019. Having an adequate supply of well-trained and appropriately skilled teachers may have implications for the quality of teaching as well as the capacity of teachers to provide academic support to students with various capabilities (UNESCO, 2015).

Can ICTs create effective learning environments for the disadvantaged and the marginalised?

We also asked questions about whether ICTs can create effective learning environments for disadvantaged and marginalised students. The respondents answered using a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 denoted *strongly disagree* and 4 indicated *strongly agree*. The responses are summarised in Figure 6.

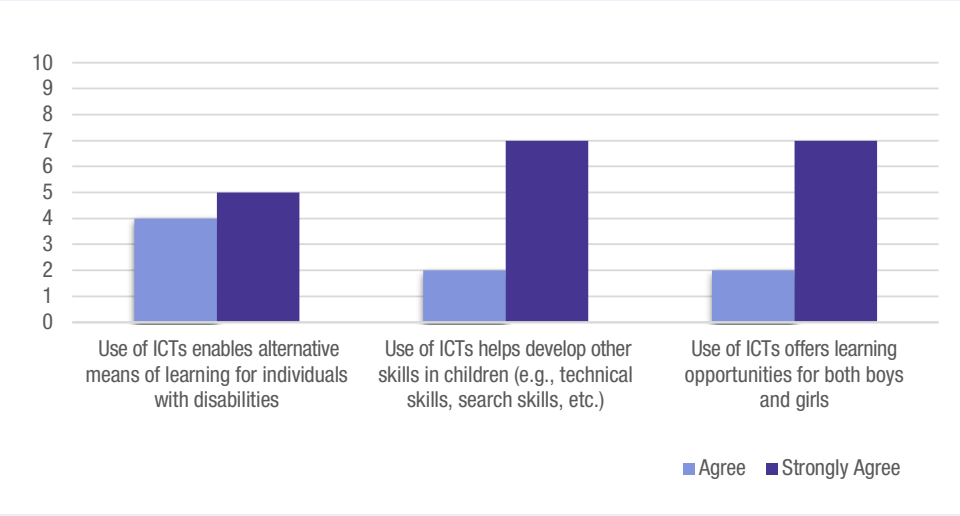

Figure 6: ICTs for Effective Learning Environments

Almost all the participants strongly agreed that, when used appropriately, ICTs can create effective learning environments for disadvantaged and marginalised students. There is no doubt that the education sector can benefit tremendously from using ICTs as a means of providing distance, open and flexible learning and as a means of communication. This study highlights that all nine PICs face numerous challenges in terms of providing ICT-enhanced education and training, mainly because of the high cost of Internet access and unreliable connectivity in countries such as Papua New Guinea, Nauru and Vanuatu. In addition, it is important to have an adequate supply of teachers who are skilled in using ICTs. The study revealed that there is a shortage of ICT specialist teachers and that most teachers do not have a sufficient understanding of or expertise in the effective use of ICTs in teaching and learning. Several countries noted that providing training to teachers located in remote and outer islands is not only logistically difficult but also expensive.

Factors that influence the use of ICTs in schools

The last set of questions asked the respondents to rate the factors that influenced the extent of use of ICTs in schools in their countries. Their answers were recorded using a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 representing *not at all* and 4 representing *to a very large extent.* The responses, summarised in Figure 7, reveal that the use of ICTs in education is largely driven by the cost of Internet access, followed by the state of ICT infrastructure and the availability of computers for students and teachers to use in teaching and learning. ICTs are underused as a learning tool in countries such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Nauru because Internet access is either not available or very expensive (UNESCO, 2015).

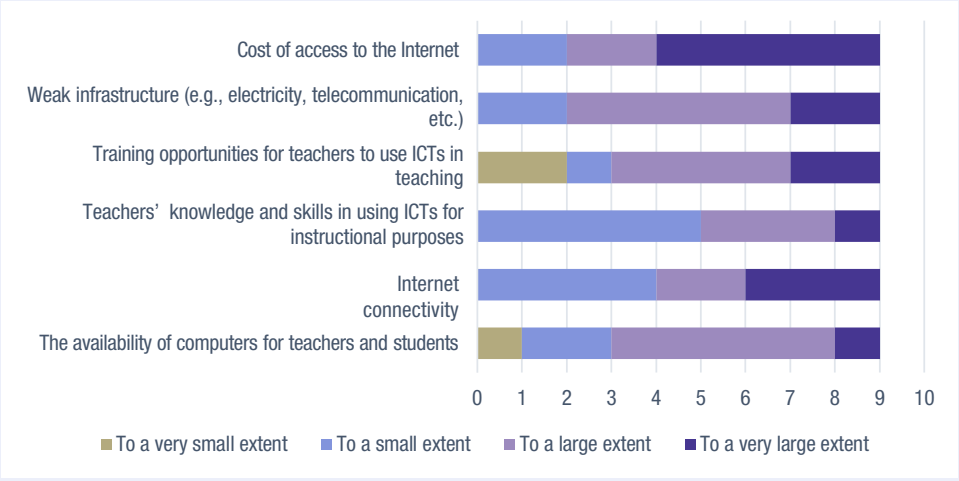

Figure 7: Factors that Influence the Use of ICTs in Schools

Concluding Remarks

This report set out to:

- provide an overview of the status of OOSC in the Commonwealth member countries of the Pacific (PICs),
- identify the barriers that contribute to exclusion or dropping out from school education in the selected countries, and
- briefly describe the existing policies and strategies implemented by the countries to increase access to education.

All nine PICs participated fully in this study, which is a strong indicator of their commitment to address OOSC. Their inputs, via the survey, interview or both, provide an essential overview of their particular OOSC status. We found that all nine PICs have implemented policies and initiatives to increase enrolment in basic education and are working to address equity, access and quality, as these issues remain a serious threat to providing education for all in each country context. The study also revealed that each PIC faces various challenges related to OOSC, some of which are universal, and others particular to a given PIC.

Some PICs have made concerted progress in reducing the number of OOSC by abolishing school fees, improving the curriculum, introducing social cash transfers, improving school infrastructure and investing in the professional development of their teachers.

Additionally, remarkable improvements in the gross enrolment rate (GER) have been noted, although improvements were found by some PICs in the corresponding net enrolment rate (NER). Overall, it is evident that many children of school age are still not enrolled in schools. In the study countries, the OOSC population is most likely to be from the poorest families, located in the outer islands

with limited if any Internet access and unlikely to learn from teachers with specialist training in their subject areas, inclusive education or effective use of ICTs.

Our second objective, to identify the barriers that contribute to exclusion or dropping out from school education, revealed that the greatest barrier to access is poverty. Although significant, lack of financial resources is a complex matter beyond the scope of this study. It is, however, universally accepted that education is the most accessible pathway to alleviate poverty. The survey revealed that the second-largest barrier to addressing OOSC was low academic performance (five respondents, or 56 per cent of the sample). Other notable barriers included natural disasters, violence in schools, inadequate identification measures for at-risk students, shortage of teachers, teacher absenteeism, lack of teaching and learning resources, and disabilities. Many of these matters have linkages to government spending or a challenging curriculum, yet paradoxically, these items were almost universally not identified as barriers by respondents (seven respondents, or 78 per cent of the sample, indicated "Inaccurate" as a barrier). Except for natural disasters, which require a government response that transcends education to infrastructure and mitigation strategies, the other noted barriers are within the purview of the education establishment. Clearly, there is a need for capacity building of educators to better respond to the needs of learners, along with commensurate support from governments to provide this training (see the recommendations, below).

We found that some of these matters are already being addressed, and the third objective, to describe the existing policies and strategies implemented by the countries to increase access to education, offered some important findings from which each PIC may benefit. Substantial detail is found in the country-specific chapters (chapters 2 to 10). Some highlights are shared in this section.

In Fiji and Nauru, there are policies or schemes to fund ground and water transport to school. Nauru also has a free lunch programme, and Papua New Guinea has a policy on student behaviour management. The Solomon Islands and Tuvalu have placed a focus on capacity building of teachers around issues of inclusion and gender equality through action plans or policies. Vanuatu, with funding from the Australian government, implemented a universal access policy to widen access to ICT with the provision of devices and centres to provide Internet access, though more capacity building of teachers has been acknowledged as an issue that needs to be addressed through ongoing continuing professional development. The Kiribati Connectivity Project, funded by the Asian Development Bank and World Bank, will improve Internet connectivity with some focus on its use in education. Samoa has a policy addressing students with disabilities with some focus on training teachers to support these learners, and Tonga has identified similar challenges in its disability survey report. As will be delineated in the following chapters, ample policies, strategies and other documents have been produced across the PICs from which they may all benefit. Overall, there is one significant limitation for this study. The lack of up-to-date data related to OOSC in the nine PICs made it difficult to measure the magnitude of exclusion from formal education in each country. There is a need to provide accurate statistical disaggregated data on OOSC and identify the reasons children are not attending schools. Even though getting accurate and reliable statistics may not solve the issue of OOSC, it might

show decision makers the realities facing the disadvantaged and the marginalised and help in identifying reasons for exclusion so targeted interventions and policies can be developed.

Recommendations

The factors influencing OOSC in the nine PICs in this study are multifaceted and as such require a multi-sectoral approach that will target all the elements that affect educational outcomes. There is a genuine need to devise targeted interventions for clearly defined problems based on research on how best to cater to those who have dropped out or are disengaged. Any intervention designed to address the issue of OOSC should incorporate a gender perspective to respond to the discrete needs of young men and women. Some recommendations derived from this study are noted below.

Training and capacity building

- All the interview participants acknowledged the need to design and deliver ICT-enhanced training programmes for education stakeholders. The interview participants agreed that training programmes in the Pacific should seek to build ICT competencies not only for students but also for pre- and in-service teachers, principals and educators.
- Run skills, capacity-development and sensitisation trainings for educators to improve their teaching practices and keep students engaged. Teachers need to be trained in developing interesting lessons using technology and innovative teaching practices, developing critical thinking in students and modelling inclusive education practices.
- Instructional leadership training programmes are needed for school administrators.
- Capacity-building training is needed for education stakeholders to better identify and address, particularly at an early stage, the learning needs of those who are at risk of dropping out.

Inclusive education

- Improving the quality of education should be prioritised. A recurring concern expressed by all the stakeholders was the inadequate training of teachers working with children with additional needs, a group that is particularly marginalised in the school system across the nine PICs. All the participants agreed that the school system needs to implement mechanisms to accommodate different types of learners. This is particularly important given that free primary education has opened up access to diverse sets of learners in all nine PICs.

Preventing violence in schools

- To minimise violence in schools, there is an urgent need to implement policies that protect children from violence in schools. There is also a need to train teachers on the use of alternative discipline methods.

ICTs

- Integrating online learning in the teaching and learning processes, and the commensurate capacity building among teachers, should be seriously considered.
- To support the above point, concerted efforts are needed to expand access to affordable and reliable Internet connectivity, networked devices and related technical support.

TVET

- Strengthen policies that support and elevate the status of TVET education at all levels of education.
- Reform TVET so that it is linked to labour market opportunities and is responsive to local needs.
- Provide more resources for vocational and technical centres.

Second-chance education

- Expand alternative/second-chance learning opportunities that offer equivalency with the formal system.
- Invest in developing low-cost alternative education programmes to engage dropouts.

Curriculum

- There is a need to strengthen the curriculum to make it more relevant to students by considering their interests and labour market needs.
- There is an additional need to embrace elements of technology-enabled learning in the curriculum. This will also require capacity building and ongoing professional development of educators, investment in hardware and other infrastructure and sustained political will.

All the participants who were interviewed in this study agreed that improving the quality of education can positively influence student performance and retention. The interviewees also stated that greater emphasis should be placed on the implementation of flexible learning strategies, life skills education, differentiated pedagogy, and individualised instruction and tailored learning activities that support students with various educational needs. Participants also stated that training teaching and management staff in inclusive education and dropout detection and prevention is crucial to the development of the education system. To provide

quality equitable education for all, it is paramount to explore innovative strategies that would cater for the diversity of learning needs beyond the conventional system of education.

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Appendix 1: Survey Instrument

Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific Survey

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in collaboration with the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD) is commissioning a study into Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific. Data gathered from this survey will enable COL and PACFOLD to come up with interventions to build capacity for governments, schools and related institutions to help improve access to quality education for OOSC in the Pacific.

UNESCO defines OOSC as children of school age who are not enrolled in pre-primary, primary or secondary schools or non-formal education. COL has a dedicated initiative to support OOSC with open schooling. Open schooling is an education model that provides flexibility to the learner to learn where and when they want, where feasible, while being away from the school and teacher.

Please respond to ALL the questions in this survey in relation to your country (the survey should take 15–20 minutes to complete, and your participation in this is voluntary). You and your organisation will remain **anonymous** and will not be identified in any reporting of this data. The name of your organisation and email are requested only for follow-up on any responses provided (see questions 1–3 below), and will be utilised by COL and PACFOLD only.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please direct any questions or concerns about this survey to Ms. Sharishna Narayan: *Sharishna.narayan@usp.ac.fj* at the University of the South Pacific.

1. **Name of organisation and location:** .....
2. **Name of representative completing this survey:** .....
3. **Email address: (for internal use only by COL and PACFOLD):** .....
4. **Status:**
   - ☐ Government department or Ministry
   - ☐ CSO/ NGO/Charitable organisation/non-profit
   - ☐ Public education/training institution
   - ☐ Private education/training institution
   - ☐ Other (Please specify): .....
5. **Rural-based or Urban-based:** .....
6. **In which of the following areas does your organisation/institution work? Select all that apply.**
   - ☐ Technical and Vocational Skills Development
   - ☐ Resilience (e.g., climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction)
   - ☐ Formal Education (e.g., primary, lower secondary or upper secondary schools)
   - ☐ Non-formal Education (e.g., correspondence, non-accredited learning)
   - ☐ Other (Please specify): .....
7. **According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics data for 2018, about 258 million children and youth are out of school. This is inclusive of 59 million children of primary school age, 62 million children of lower-secondary school age and 138 million children of upper-secondary school age.**
   How serious a concern is OOSC in your country for

   a. Primary school age (6–14)

Not at all serious	Somewhat serious	Serious	Very serious

   b. Lower/Junior secondary school age (15–16)

Not at all serious	Somewhat serious	Serious	Very serious

   c. Upper secondary school age (17–19)

Not at all serious	Somewhat serious	Serious	Very serious

8. Children may drop out of schools for a number of reasons. How accurately do the following reasons represent the situation in your country?

Reason	I am not sure	Inaccurately	Accurately
Curriculum is too challenging			
Curriculum lacks cultural relevance			
Curriculum is gender insensitive			
Low academic performance of students			
Natural disasters and climate change			
Teenage pregnancies			
Bias or discrimination based on gender			
Violence in schools (e.g., peer bullying, physical fights, corporal punishment, etc.)			
Inadequate identification measures for at-risk students			
Inadequate government expenditure towards education			
Lack of properly trained teachers			
Shortage of teachers			
Absenteeism of teachers			
Lack of quality resources (e.g., textbooks, computers, classrooms, etc.)			
Family responsibilities of children			
School access is a challenge (e.g., physical distance)			
Disabilities (e.g., impairment, activity limitations and participation restrictions)			
Chronic illness (e.g., asthma, depression, congenital heart disease, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, diabetes, etc.)			
Cost (e.g., fees, textbooks, uniforms, information and communications technologies (ICTs))			
Economic hardships (e.g., poverty, involvement in domestic or farm labour)			

9. A wide range of strategies can be provided to children who are at risk of dropping out of schools. To what extent are the following strategies provided to help children who are struggling in your country?

Strategies	To a very small extent	To a small extent	Some-what	To a large extent	To a very large extent
Inclusive teaching strategies (regardless of gender)					
Effective and high quality of teaching					
Proper school facilities (e.g., classrooms, desks and chairs, library, computer labs, etc.)					
Viable pathways to pursue alternative or further education (e.g., vocational, college, university)					
On-going counselling systems (e.g., for students, parents and caregivers)					
Flexible learning strategies (e.g., online, at-home, non-paced)					
Use of assistive technology for children with disabilities					
A curriculum that offers choices about what to study, when to study, how to study and when and how to be assessed					
After-school tutoring for children with or without disabilities who are at risk of failing					
Remedial lessons					
Differentiated instructions based on students' learning needs					
Transport free provision or subsidy					
Textbook free provision or subsidy					
Free provision or subsidy for meals in school					
Free provision or subsidy for school uniforms					
School fee exemption or subsidy (e.g., tuition, incidental costs)					
Tuition fee exemption or subsidy					

Others:.....

10. Rate whether the following second-chance* learning opportunities/alternative pathways to education are provided to students who are unable to complete secondary education in your country. **Second chance education is "education specifically targeted at individuals who, for a variety of reasons, never attended school or left school before completion but wish to enter an education program or occupation for which they are not yet qualified" (The International Standard Classification of Education, 1975).*

	Never	Rarely	Often	Always
Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) in schools				
Education and training provided by Non-Governmental Organisations (e.g., Red Cross or faith-based organisations)				
Community-based education for youth				
Foundational skills programmes provided by the government (e.g., literacy, numeracy and digital literacy)				
Open schooling				

Others: .....

11. Effective professional development opportunities enable the teachers to enhance the knowledge and skills they would need to create effective and engaging learning environments for all the children. Rate how the following strategies are used to help teachers in your country to prevent children from exiting schools before they complete their education.

	Never	Rarely	Often	Always
Inclusiveness in education (e.g., gender and disability)				
Use of ICTs in teaching and learning				
Providing the teachers with sufficient learning materials to teach students with disabilities (e.g., special software for computers, assistive technology, Braille books, etc.)				

12. When used appropriately, ICTs can create effective learning environments for the disadvantaged and the marginalised in our communities. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following claims/statements:

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Use of ICT enables alternative means of learning for individuals with disabilities				
Use of ICT helps develop other skills in children (e.g., technical skills, search skills, etc.)				
Use of ICT offers learning opportunities for both boys and girls				

13. Please rate how the following factors influence the extent of use of ICTs in schools in your country:

	Not at all	To a small extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent
The availability of computers for teachers and students				
Internet connectivity				
Teachers' knowledge and skills in using ICTs for instructional purpose				
Training opportunities for teachers to use ICTs in teaching				
Weak infrastructure (e.g., electricity, telecommunication, etc.)				
Cost of access to the Internet				

END OF SURVEY

Appendix 2: Interview Guides for Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Nauru and Tonga

Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific Interview Guide – Papua New Guinea

1. According to the survey, conducted by the University of the South Pacific in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (Canada), OOSC is a serious problem in Papua New Guinea for primary, junior-secondary and upper-secondary school age groups. Additionally, the desk study revealed that dropout rates increase at Grade 8–9 and Grade 10–11 transition.
   - *Is this an accurate picture of the current situation? Do you agree with this assertion? Why or why not?*
2. The survey highlighted that the barriers contributing to OOSC in Papua New Guinea include a curriculum that lacks cultural relevance and is gender-insensitive, natural disasters, teenage pregnancies, lack of government spending on education, lack of trained teachers, teacher shortages, inadequate learning resources, school inaccessibility, disabilities and child labour.
   - *Would you like to comment on any of the above barriers? Are some more pronounced than others? What sort of strategies and policy responses are there to deal with these barriers? What more could be done and how?*
3. The OOSC survey found that there are many alternative pathways in education for students who are at risk of dropping out in Papua New Guinea.
   - *Would you like to comment on some of the initiatives/programmes or pathways available for students who are at risk of dropping out?*
4. You mentioned in the survey that flexible learning strategies could help some of the aforementioned disparities/barriers.

- *What form of flexible learning do you have in mind that may work, and how might this be provided and by whom?*

5. The survey revealed that ICTs can create effective learning environments for the disadvantaged and the marginalised in Papua New Guinea. However, the desktop study revealed in 2017 that approximately 11 per cent of the population was connected to the Internet.
   - *Do you think this is a true reflection of the status of (lack of) connectivity in the country?*
   - *What sort of plans does the Ministry have to assist remote and isolated schools to connect them to the Internet?*
6. To what extent is open schooling used as a strategy to address the issue of school dropouts in Papua New Guinea? How might this be expanded and are there particular targets (curriculum, grade level, gender, children with disabilities)?
7. Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding the issue of OOSC in Papua New Guinea?

Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific
Interview Guide – Fiji

1. According to the survey, conducted by the University of the South Pacific in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (Canada), OOSC is a serious problem in Fiji for primary and junior-secondary school age groups. However, data from the desktop study taken from an MEHA unpublished manuscript of 2018 states that the Net Enrolment Rate for primary education in 2018 reached 100% while the total Retention Rate was 95%. For secondary education, the Retention Rate was 84.5%. This suggests that OOSC is more a problem in secondary schools than in primary schools.
   - *Is this an accurate picture of the current situation? Do you agree with this assertion? Why or why not?*
2. The survey highlighted that the barriers contributing to OOSC in Fiji include natural disasters, teenage pregnancies, violence in schools, teacher absenteeism and peer pressure for truancy. The desktop research, in addition, revealed that the associated costs of sending children to school and the exam-oriented structure in schools contribute to high attrition rates.
   - *Would you like to comment on any of the above barriers? Are some more pronounced than others? What sort of strategies and policy responses are there to deal with these barriers? What more could be done and how?*
3. The OOSC survey found that there are very few alternative pathways in education for students who are at risk of dropping out.
   - *What are the reasons for this and are there any strategies in place to address this problem?*
4. You mentioned in the survey that flexible learning strategies could help some of the aforementioned disparities/barriers.
   - *What form of flexible learning do you have in mind that may work, and how might this be provided and by whom?*

5. ICTs can create effective learning environments for the disadvantaged and the marginalised in Fiji and the desktop study revealed that there were at least 79 schools in Fiji lacking such connectivity at all (according to the *Access to Quality Education Programme Internet Connectivity Report*, 2017).
   - *Do you think this is a true reflection of the status of (lack of) connectivity in schools?*
   - *What sort of plans does the Ministry have to assist remote and isolated schools to connect them to the Internet?*
6. The Matua Programme, which is a second-chance education programme for school dropouts, operates in only one secondary school (Nabua Secondary School).
   - *Are there any plans for the government to extend this initiative to other schools (rural and maritime areas)?*
   - *Another institute that provides second-chance education to school dropouts is the Marist Champagnat Institute (MCI). What are some ways in which the Ministry offers support to MCI?*
7. What are your thoughts about using open schooling as a strategy to address the issue of school dropouts in Fiji? How might this be developed and are there particular targets (curriculum, grade level)?
8. Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding the issue of OOSC in Fiji?

Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific
Interview Guide – Nauru

1. According to the survey, conducted by the University of the South Pacific in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (Canada), OOSC is a serious problem in Nauru for junior-secondary and upper-secondary school age groups. However, the 2018 enrolment figures taken out of the *Nauru Voluntary National Review Report* (2019) reveal that almost 13% of Year 6 and 7 students did not enrol at the next level in 2019. This suggests that OOSC is also a problem in primary schools.
   - *Is this an accurate picture of the current situation? Do you agree with this assertion? Why or why not?*
2. The survey and desktop study highlighted that the barriers contributing to OOSC in Nauru include low academic performance of students, violence in schools, inadequate identification measures for at-risk students, teacher shortages, inaccessible transport for children with disabilities and teacher absenteeism.
   - *Would you like to comment on any of the above barriers? Are some more pronounced than others? What sort of strategies and policy responses are there to deal with these barriers? What more could be done and how?*
3. The OOSC survey found that there are very few alternative pathways in education for students who are at risk of dropping out.
   - *What are the reasons for this and are there any strategies in place to address this problem?*

4. You mentioned in the survey that flexible learning strategies could help some of the aforementioned disparities/barriers.
   - *What form of flexible learning do you have in mind that may work, and how might this be provided and by whom?*
5. According to the survey, ICTs can create effective learning environments for the disadvantaged and the marginalised in Nauru.
   - *How are ICTs integrated into the education system in Nauru?*
   - *What sort of plans does the Ministry have to assist remote and isolated schools to connect them to the Internet?*
6. What are your thoughts about using open schooling as a strategy to address the issue of school dropouts in Nauru? How might this be developed and are there particular targets (curriculum, grade level)?
7. Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding the issue of OOSC in Nauru?

Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific
Interview Guide – Tonga

1. According to the survey, conducted by the University of the South Pacific in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (Canada), OOSC is a somewhat serious problem in Tonga for primary, junior-secondary and senior-secondary school age groups. However, data from *Tonga's Youth: Analysis of the Situation of Young People Based on the 2016 Population and Housing Census* reports that by the time the youth in Tonga reach the age of 17, 28% of them have already dropped out of school. This suggests that OOSC is a problem more in senior secondary than in primary schools.
   - *Is this an accurate picture of the current situation? Do you agree with this assertion? Why or why not?*
2. The 2018 *Tonga Disability Survey Report* highlighted that the barriers contributing to OOSC in Tonga include distance from school, inability to pay tuition fees or for school uniforms, bullying, corporal punishment, disability, child labour and others. However, the survey did not reveal much about the reasons behind students dropping out of schools.
   - *Would you like to comment on any of the above barriers? Are some more pronounced than others? What sort of strategies and policy responses are there to deal with these barriers? What more could be done and how?*
3. The OOSC survey found that there are very few alternative pathways in education for students who are at risk of dropping out.
   - *What are the reasons for this and are there any strategies in place to address this problem?*
4. You mentioned in the survey that flexible learning strategies could help some of the aforementioned disparities/barriers.
   - *What form of flexible learning do you have in mind that may work, and how might this be provided and by whom?*
5. According to the survey, ICTs can create effective learning environments for the disadvantaged and the marginalised. The desktop study revealed that

all secondary schools in Tonga are connected to the Internet using the TCC and most primary and secondary schools have computers from donations (Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, Economic and Social Impact of ICT in the Pacific, 2015).

- *Do you think this is a true reflection of the status of connectivity in schools?*
- *What sort of plans does the Ministry have to assist remote and isolated schools to connect them to the Internet?*

6. The Skills and Employment for Tongans (SET) project is an initiative funded by the International Development Association, the World Bank and the Australia-Pacific Islands Partnership Trust Fund that aims to address Tonga's high secondary school dropout rates (fundsforNGOs, 2018).
   - *What are other initiatives that are used to tackle the issue of school dropouts in Tonga?*
   - *What more needs to be done to increase access to education and reduce dropout rates?*
7. What are your thoughts about using open schooling as a strategy to address the issue of school dropouts in Tonga? How might this be developed and are there particular targets (curriculum, grade level)?
8. Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding the issue of OOSC in Tonga?

CHAPTER

2

Fiji:
Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific

Executive Summary

In Fiji, the right to education is entrenched in the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, 2020, which guarantees the rights of every Fijian to early childhood, primary, secondary and further education. The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) has initiated a number of programmes for the universalisation of access to primary and secondary school.

The government has increased investment in all levels of education over the past five years with initiatives such as free primary and secondary education, a bus fare assistance scheme, textbooks for students to use free of charge in primary and secondary schools, and tertiary education scholarships and loan schemes for students who graduate from secondary schools (Ministry of Economy, 2017). The limited data available to the Fiji Educational Management Information Systems (FEMIS) show that the number of children being enrolled in early childhood care and education (ECCE) has increased notably over the past ten years. The positive effect of ECCE is evident from 2020 Pacific Data Hub data, which showed that almost 95 per cent of new entrants in primary school had ECCE experience in 2016.

The literacy rate in Fiji is high, and this is attributed to universal access to primary and secondary education as well as increased investment in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The indicators on access to basic education in Fiji have improved over the years, but the education sector still faces particular challenges: retention, school dropouts and quality of education.

While the primary net enrolment rate (NER) reached 97 per cent in 2016, the NER for secondary education was comparatively low (83.6 per cent) in 2016 (Pacific Data Hub, 2020) This means some students of secondary school-age either were not enrolled in education or dropped out before completing their education.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics data from 2020 also indicate that more female than male students are transitioning into secondary schools.

Data gathering and analysis continue to be a challenge, as most data required are not captured by MEHA. However, efforts have been directed by MEHA towards the collection of new data and the streamlining of data from different silos of the various ministries in the country (UNICEF, 2017).

Country Profile: Geography and Demographics

Fiji is an archipelago of 322 islands, fewer than half of which are inhabited, in the South Pacific Ocean in the geographic sub-region Melanesia (UNDP, 2020a) (see Figure 8). The two largest and most heavily populated islands are Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. The capital of the country, Suva, lies on the island of Viti Levu. The Population and Housing Census of 2017 put the total population of Fiji at 884,887 (50.7 per cent male and 49.3 per cent female), compared to 837,271 in 2007, an increase of 5.7 per cent (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The median age of the population is 27.5 years, signifying that half the population is below the age of 30 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

A total of 113,595 people aged 3 and older were reported to have at least one functioning challenge. This number equates to a rate of 13.7 per cent, which is close to the international average of 15 per cent. The percentage was highest in Rotuma with 21.7 per cent, followed by Lau at 18.2 per cent; the province of Nadroga/Navosa recorded the lowest rate, 10.4 per cent (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Fiji ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010,

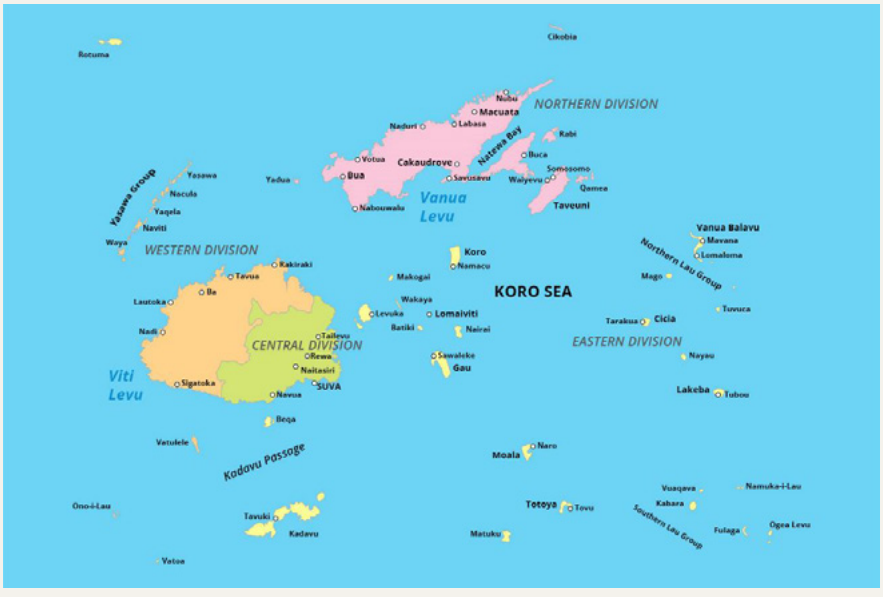

Figure 8: Map of Fiji

Source: Mapsland (2021). (Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 3.0 Licence)

and the right to basic services for people with disabilities is included in Fiji's Constitution (Ministry of Economy, 2017).

Fiji's GDP in 2017 was USD5.06 billion, with a GDP per capita of USD5,589 (Fijian Government, 2019). According to the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report 2020, titled *The Next Frontier, Human Development and the Anthropocene,* Fiji's Human Development Index was reported at 0.743 in 2019, putting the country in the high human development category. As far as gender is concerned, Fiji was ranked 84 out of 195 countries in the 2019 index with a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.370 (UNDP, 2020b).

Like other Pacific Island nations, Fiji is susceptible to the adverse effects of climate change and extreme weather patterns. The rapid rise in sea level has resulted in saltwater intrusion, and coastal flooding has made sections of the island nation uninhabitable. Fiji also experiences destructive weather patterns that cause large-scale damage and destruction. One of the worst recorded natural disasters to hit Fiji was Tropical Cyclone Winston, which ravaged the country in 2016 and not only took the lives of 44 Fijians but also caused great destruction, costing the entire economy an estimated FJD1.4 billion (USD6.6 million) in damages (COP23 Fiji, 2017–2018).

Power in Fiji is produced by renewable energy sources such as hydro, biomass and wind (UNDP, 2014). The 2017 national census revealed that 94 per cent of all households had some form of electricity; of those, 78 per cent relied on the national electricity grid, 12.4 per cent relied on solar energy and the remaining 3.6 per cent used diesel generators and communal diesel and hydro plants as their energy source.

Overview of the Education Sector in Fiji

Fiji has a 2-8-2-3 formal education structure with two years of preschool, eight years of primary school, two years of lower-secondary school and three years of senior secondary school (UNICEF, 2017). Education in Fiji is free and compulsory for 6- to 16-year-olds. There are 871 registered ECCE centres, 171 secondary schools, 736 primary schools and 17 special education schools in Fiji (Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, 2020). For the 2016–2017 financial year, the government budget for education was FJD448.5 million (USD211.1 million), an increase of 3 per cent in 2016–2017 compared to 2016 (Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, 2017).

A total of FJD800 million (USD376.7 million) was allocated to the education sector per the National Budget Address for 2019–2020.

Early childhood education centres (ECCE)

ECCE education in Fiji is provided to 3- 8-year-olds via programmes conducted in the three national languages of Fiji — Fijian, Hindi and Rotuman — as required. The ECCE centres are managed by school management committees, which also recruit the teaching staff. An ECCE policy introduced in 2007 mandates universal access to early childhood education for children of the relevant age group.

Primary and secondary education

Fiji's concerted efforts in the education sector have not yet achieved universal access to primary and secondary education. Current enrolment in primary schools stands at 100 per cent, and enrolment in secondary schools at 85 per cent (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Higher education

Higher education in Fiji is managed by the Fiji Higher Education Commission, which operates as a statutory body governed by the *Fiji Higher Education Act* of 2008. Under this act, higher education includes all post-secondary education provided in Fiji, which includes colleges, universities, language and secretarial schools, hospitality training centres, caregiving training providers, religious education institutes, information technology centres, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and performing arts and sports academies (Fiji Higher Education Commission, 2008).

Three universities deliver higher education services in the country: the University of the South Pacific, the Fiji National University and the University of Fiji. Several other higher education institutions offer accredited qualifications.

Inclusive education

Fiji's national development plans and its constitution aim to increase inclusivity in the education system. There are 17 specialised and 67 mainstream secondary schools that serve children with disabilities. The government's commitment to inclusive education is shared by the University of the South Pacific through its Disability Resource Centre, which provides sign language interpreters and other services that cater to the needs of people with special needs (Republic of Fiji, 2019).

Private schools

Fiji has a total of 22 private schools, 15 primary and 7 secondary, which offer an international curriculum. These schools do not receive any assistance from the government (Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, 2018a).

Key Education Statistics

Statistics from the latest census (see Table 4) show that over 27 per cent of the population was attending school at the time of the census; 13.8 per cent of the population, the majority of whom are situated in rural areas, had never attended school.

Table 4: Educational Status by Geographic Sector in Fiji

Category	Total		Rural		Urban	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total Population	884,887	100	381,286	100	503,601	100
Attending School	247,033	27.9	107,403	28.2	139,630	27.7
Not Attending School	637,854	72.1	273,883	71.8	363,971	72.3
Left School	515,536	58.3	220,312	57.8	295,044	58.6
Never Attended	122,498	13.8	53,571	14.1	68,927	13.7

Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2018)

At-school population in 2017

Table 5 (below) shows the number of students who were attending school at the time of the 2017 census. The figures show that there were slightly more male students than female in school, and the number of children attending schools was higher in rural areas than urban centres.

Table 5: The At-School Population by Sex and Geographic Sector in Fiji

Category	Total Population			Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total Attending	247,033	123,567	123,466	139,630	68,827	70,803	107,403	54,740	52,663
Kindergarten	17,525	8,885	8,640	8,353	4,208	4,145	9,172	4,677	4,495
Primary	102,775	52,662	50,113	53,077	27,164	25,913	49,698	25,498	24,200
Secondary	84,383	42,027	42,356	46,227	22,591	23,636	38,156	19,436	18,720
Post-Secondary	41,277	19,379	21,898	31,236	14,437	16,799	10,041	4,942	5,099
Other	1,073	614	459	737	427	310	336	187	149

Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2018)

Table 6: Enrolment Rates/Ratios for 2016 in Fiji

Gross Enrolment Rate in Primary Education (%)	111.1
Net Enrolment Rate in Primary Education (%)	96.8
Gross Enrolment Rate in Secondary Education (%)	88.4
Net Enrolment Ratio in Secondary Education (%)	83.6

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020)

While primary enrolment reached more than 90 per cent, the net enrolment rate for secondary education is lower (83.6 per cent), as shown in Table 6. The gross and net enrolment rates for secondary education show that fewer students are transitioning into secondary schools. This suggests that a proportion of students of secondary school-age either are not enrolled or dropped out before completing their secondary education.

Figures 9 and 10 show data on out-of-school children for primary education from 2013 to 2016. The statistics indicate that school access and student retention are a concern in Fiji.

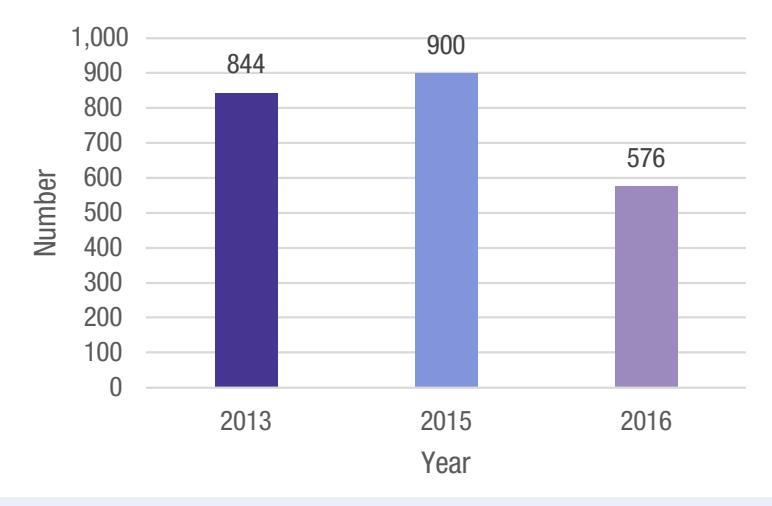

Figure 9: Out-of-School Children at the Primary Level in Fiji

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020)

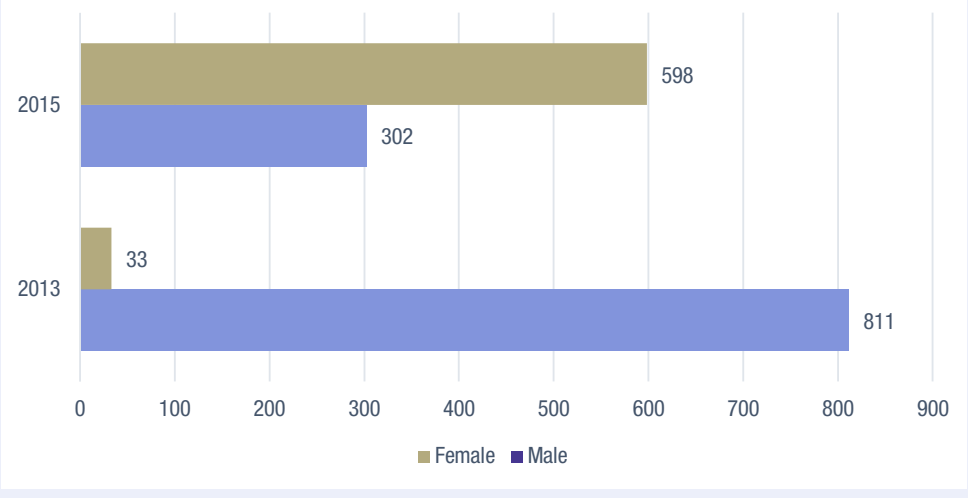

Figure 10: Out-of-School Children, Primary, Male and Female in Fiji

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020)

Special/Inclusive education

The Fiji Bureau of Statistics' *2017 Population and Housing Census Release 1 Report Age, Sex, Geography and Economic Activity* (2018) states that a total of 113,595 persons aged 3 and above were reported to have at least one disability at the time of the 2017 census. The figure equates to a rate of 13.7 per cent, which is close to the international benchmark of 15 per cent.

There were a total of 1,071 children with disabilities (642 male students and 429 female) studying in various special schools in Fiji in 2016, as reported in the *Education Sector Snapshot for Comprehensive School Safety and Education in Emergencies Fiji* (Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts, 2016). Teachers trained in teaching in primary schools teach at special education schools in Fiji. They do not get formal training or qualifications in teaching students with disabilities but the Special Education Unit based at the Ministry of Education regularly provides training through professional development workshops (Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts, 2016).

Teacher Qualifications

Teacher qualifications are a sound measure of the quality of the education system. The latest data on teacher qualifications could not be obtained, but the figures for 2010 indicate that the majority of teachers teaching in Fiji's schools have some form of qualification (Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts, 2016). Table 7 shows the percentage of teachers certified to teach according to National Standards for each school type in 2010.

Table 7: Qualified Teachers in Fiji

	2010			
Qualifications	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Special Schools (%)	Total Number of Teachers
Master's Degree or Higher	0.2	0.8	1.0	48
Bachelor's Degree and Postgraduate Diploma	8.8	55.1	8.0	2,963
Diploma or Advanced Diploma	9.3	39.6	3.5	2,132
Certificate or Advanced Certificate	80.3	1.0	42.8	4,100
Form 7 or Lower	1.4	3.5	44.7	306

Source: Ministry of Education, National Heritage, and Culture & Arts (2016)

One of the challenges faced by the Ministry is finding enough graduates from the technical/vocational sector who are interested in teaching. There is a high attrition rate for teachers in this sector as some move to the private sector in search of more lucrative employment opportunities. The Ministry of Education encourages teachers to continuously upgrade their qualifications. The government has

allocated an annual budget of FJD700,000 for in-service training for teachers who wish to study either in Fiji or overseas (Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts, 2016).

Fiji's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Infrastructure

According to the Population and Housing Census for 2016, 96 per cent of the population of Fiji had access to at least a 3G network. Fiji was the first island nation in the Pacific to implement a broadband policy and it has experienced substantial growth in broadband connectivity over the past decade. Fiji is served by three international submarine cable systems. A submarine cable project that was commissioned in 2018 has substantially increased connectivity speeds on Vanua Levu (the second-largest island) by "fifty times, from two gigabits to 100 gigabits per second across the island" (UNDP, 2019, p. 17). This initiative has enabled an increase in connectivity in schools and connected people in the most remote parts of Vanua Levu.

Recent initiatives

The government has implemented some initiatives to increase access to telecommunication services in the country — for example, the Free Wi-Fi Zone initiative, the continued expansion of e-Government services, the Community Telecentre project and the Universal Service Access project. These initiatives enhance the connectivity of Fijians to the outside world. To further improve ICT penetration on Vanua Levu, the Fijian government is working with the World Bank to extend the Southern Cross Cable from Fiji to Samoa to the southern tip of Vanua Levu.

Table 8 shows the latest data available on Internet use and access in Fiji.

Table 8: Statistics on Internet Use in 2019 in Fiji

Population (2019 estimate)	918,757
Users in December 2000	7,500
Internet Usage, June 2019	500,958
% Population (penetration)	54.5%
Internet Users (%)	1.7%
No. of Facebook Users, December 2018	470,000
Smart Phones	118% (2017)
Secure Internet Servers	187 (2019)
Fixed Broadband Subscriptions	13,033 (2018)

Source: Internet World Stats (2020); World Bank (n.d.)

Connectivity in schools

In order to find out the extent of Internet connectivity in schools in Fiji, the Ministry of Education commissioned a study through the Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP) in 2017. The study's main aim was to find out which schools in Fiji needed improvements in terms of Internet connectivity.

The Fiji Educational Management Information Systems (FEMIS) survey as well as key informant interviews confirmed that 48 schools in Fiji had no Internet connectivity, 100 had poor connectivity, 130 had mixed connectivity and 62 had stable but slow connectivity.

Some schools reported having no mobile coverage with sporadic voice call coverage. Teachers in such situations had to travel to a nearby town simply to update their school FEMIS database when required. The data also show that some schools are in areas where there is no network coverage at all, which makes a simple voice call difficult (Leeming, 2017). Teachers in schools located in such remote locations travel almost 20 kilometres to a town either once a week or once a month or call other schools to find out if important emails or circulars have been issued. Most of the remotely located schools face connectivity issues and as a result are unable to fully integrate ICTs into their school system. An immediate solution would be to use offline local cloud servers such as Aptus, provided by the Commonwealth of Learning. FEMIS data during the time of the survey indicated that most primary schools had fewer than ten computers being used daily and only a few secondary schools had more than 50 computers, a computer lab and computers for administrative staff.

Donor agencies have provided computers and Internet access to schools under the Share, Engage and Educate (SEE) project. This initiative brought more than 200 computers as well as robotic kits, digital cameras and data projectors into schools; the equipment was donated by individuals and the Queensland University of Technology in Australia (SEE Project, 2014).

Challenges in Education

A 2016 report by the Asian Development Bank, *Fiji Country Gender Assessment 2015*, states that students in rural areas face challenges in accessing quality education services as there is limited access to educational materials, limited telecommunications and ICT infrastructure, and issues with attracting and retaining teachers. Distance from school presents a barrier to girls' participation in education, especially in rural and remote areas, as families may prohibit girls from travelling alone to school.

Increasing access to ECCE

A more accurate portrait of ECCE cannot be gauged due to limited data. The *Situation Analysis of Children in Fiji* report notes that the management and administration of many ECCE centres are undertaken by local committees that do not consider submitting reports and data for analysis to MEHA as mandatory (UNICEF, 2017). One reason enrolment numbers for ECCE are low in the rural and more remote

areas may be that ECCE is fee-based, despite the tuition grant system, which is systemically applied to fund a variety of education-related costs, such as administration and office operations, school infrastructure, learning resources, health and nutrition. The budgetary allocation for MOE funding for ECCE fluctuates. This inconsistency directly impacts the provision of ECCE facilities such as buildings and equipment. However, MEHA still considers that the funding is currently not enough to implement the ECCE programme throughout Fiji (UNICEF, 2017).

School dropouts

The *Situation Analysis of Children in Fiji* report (UNICEF, 2017) reveals that the main reasons presented for high attrition rates in schools include other associated costs of sending children to school for parents, family pressures and obligations, lack of parental commitment to their children's education, admission policies in schools, exam-oriented structure in the school and peer pressure.

In the past, the exam-based curriculum was seen as a contributing factor to school dropout rates, which prompted a shift to a learning-based education approach. The limited data available show that Fiji has achieved gender parity at least at the primary education level. However, at the secondary level, it was noted that more boys than girls dropped out of schools. Gender equity may seem a non-issue but it needs to be looked at in light of the fact that more boys than girls drop out of schools at the secondary level and courses in the vocational training programmes are divided according to gender.

MEHA has attempted to improve the quality of education at both the primary and secondary level, particularly in rural and remote areas, but it has not been easy. Teachers have been incentivised to move to schools in peri-urban areas and schemes have been drawn up to equip the rural schools with facilities to enable digital learning through the use of ICT. The introduction of vocational training courses in secondary schools by MEHA was to aid students in the transition from school to meaningful employment.

Teacher qualifications

More primary school teachers than secondary school teachers appear to have the minimum required qualifications; only a small percentage of secondary school teachers possess a certificate or diploma. Rural and peri-urban schools compare badly with urban schools in terms of access to and quality of education because of a lack of facilities, utilities, transportation and equipment. Teachers relocate from such schools due to these inadequacies.

Initiatives to Increase Access to Education

Providing equal access to educational services and facilities for all children throughout the country is a major concern for the Government of Fiji. The geographically dispersed schools and wide distribution of the population throughout the country present challenges, particularly in terms of increasing costs and in

administering and monitoring its services, especially in rural and remote schools. Over the past few years MEHA has implemented several policies to increase access to education and reduce dropout rates.

Policy interventions

- To achieve universal primary and secondary education, the School Zoning policy was implemented in 2012 to help schoolchildren attend any school that is closer to their homes. This initiative was introduced to help parents who experienced financial difficulties in sending their children to school. In addition to increasing access to education, this policy aims to make optimum use of resources and reduce the inequity in the distribution of educational benefits to children in Fiji.
- The mainstreaming of vocational courses in small secondary schools was approved by MEHA in 2012. Under this initiative, students can undertake vocational skills training while preparing for their external examinations. This means that when students complete Year 12 and Year 13, they also gain a trade certification to help them find employment. This reform was implemented to improve access and retention and raise the quality of students' education.
- The quality of school infrastructure, facilities and teaching resources can directly affect student learning. In Fiji, there are variations between standards in schools as some schools are well constructed and properly maintained and offer a range of facilities and adequate teaching and learning resources, while others are poorly constructed and resourced; the latter are usually found in rural areas. Donor agencies such as the European Union (EU), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Fiji Education Sector Programme (FESP) and Access to Quality Education Programme (AQEP) have provided funding to improve school infrastructure, teaching and learning in order to increase participation in schools and therefore reduce student dropout rates.
- Free education is provided to all primary and secondary students. The government provides assistance in the form of bus fares and boat vouchers, school textbooks, improvement in school infrastructure, investments in early childhood education, distance education and the abolition of exams in lower-secondary schools, for example, to ensure that school-age children have access to 12 years of basic education. As part of the Free Transport Assistance Scheme, in 2015 and 2016, the Ministry assisted 40 schools located in the rural and maritime zones in procuring boats and engines. Bus fare assistance for students was introduced in 2009, and students whose parents' joint income is less than FJD15,000 get free bus travel to and from school each day (Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts, 2016). Even though students have to sit exams in Year 6, they are given the opportunity to progress through the system right up to Year 12. At the end of Year 10, the students have a choice of either continuing their education in school or joining the Technical Education Stream. MEHA has set up a total

of 13 technical colleges which offer Certificate II (levels I and II) training in trade-related courses.

- MEHA has placed great emphasis on increasing access to ECCE in Fiji. As a result, 149 new ECE centres were established in Fiji between 2015 and 2016.
- According to the Department of Communication, there are 25 government telecentres located in schools around Fiji. The government launched the Telecentre Project in 2011, whereby telecentres were located in schools' IT labs (Department of Communication, 2020). They are used by students during the day and the community during the weekends. The aim of this initiative is to increase connectivity, bridge the digital divide in the country and increase the digital skills of Fijians, particularly those located in rural areas.

Second-chance education opportunities

There are certain programmes that give those who dropped out of school a second chance at education. A number of institutions run programmes that follow the conventional school curriculum to give students a second chance at completing a secondary qualification. For example:

- **Matua Programme:** An initiative for former secondary school students who dropped out of school (*matua* means "mature" in Fijian). This bridging programme provides an opportunity for students to complete their schooling in Years 10, 12 and 13. It gives female students an opportunity to re-enrol if they left school early because of teenage pregnancy and other socio-economic challenges. Boys who dropped out of the education system are also given a second chance to enrol in the academic stream or through TVET pathways (Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture & Arts, 2015).
- **Marist Champagnat Institute (MCI):** In 2000 the Marist brothers in Fiji opened a multicultural and co-educational school for post-primary students who have at least one disability or have dropped out of education. Most of the students come from difficult backgrounds and have experienced emotional trauma and other challenges that negatively affected their ability to learn. The MCI is the only vocational secondary school that addresses the particular needs of students with disabilities. The current enrolment is 120. The junior-secondary years (Years 9 and 10) focus on literacy, numeracy and general education subjects. The senior-secondary years (Years 11 and 12) focus on skill-based subjects: computing, catering, tailoring, agriculture, engineering and woodwork. The MCI is also registered to offer a tertiary-level Certificate IV in Early Childhood Education.

  The students at MCI are vulnerable young people who are often bullied and scorned by the general population. There is still a significant stigma attached to disability. Vocational pathways are extremely rare for students with disabilities and the usual outcomes for such students are crime, begging or domestic duties, and dependence on their family. There is currently no structure for supervised work experience at the MCI and there is

a real concern that workplaces are not yet fully safe for these students to gain work experience. This damages the students' chances to move onto tertiary vocational studies, which largely require work experience as part of the entrance criteria.

- **Youth Training Centres (YTCs):** YTCs offer second-chance programmes that target disadvantaged youth who have dropped out of the formal education system. These centres provide a number of vocational training options to ensure career development and sustainable self-employment for youth in Fiji. The Ministry of Youth and Sports operates five training centres spread across the nation's four districts that provide non-formal education courses, theoretical and practical training in music so they can find employment in the music industry, training in general agriculture and carpentry. A total of 193 youths have graduated from the five YTCs since 2015 (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2016).
- **Youth Grant Programme:** This initiative assists activities and projects initiated by individual youth, youth clubs and non-government organisations (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2016). It is coordinated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Fiji.
- **Mobile Skills Training:** This programme is an outreach capacity-building and skills-building programme that uses vocational education approaches to teach individual youth to improve their skills. It is conducted by training providers from the Fiji National University and the University of the South Pacific in communities wherever and whenever the need arises.
- **Seeds of Success:** Programmes that aim to increase youths' confidence, self-esteem and motivation, especially in terms of attaining jobs and contributing to the professional development of the country.

Concluding Remarks

Fiji has invested in the education sector by introducing free education, free access to textbooks and subsidised transportation to school. With these initiatives, the government aims to reach the unreached and disadvantaged children in society and keep them in school. The free education scheme ensures that equal opportunities are provided to all Fijians to access education, as it believes that an educated society will enable its people to progress productively. The government recognises the importance of technical and vocational education in meeting the needs of the changing labour market and addressing unemployment in the country (United Nations, 2019).

Efforts are being made by the education sector to develop centre-based programming that is aimed at the holistic development of a child at all levels, social, emotional, spiritual, cognitive and physical. The incumbent government has prioritised ECCE enrolment by laying out a series of plans including the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan. The fact that most ECCE centres are located near urban areas means that children in rural and other remote areas are disadvantaged. On a brighter note, there appears to be gender balance as far as

enrolment of boys and girls in ECCE is concerned. To ensure and strengthen quality in ECCE, the government introduced a new curriculum aimed at facilitating a child's transition to primary school from ECCE. To increase the standard of ECCE teachers, MEHA has regulated the minimum qualification standards for teaching. The increase in teachers' salaries is another incentive introduced by MEHA to retain quality teachers (UNICEF, 2017).

The focus of the Ministry of Education is not solely on ECCE but also on primary and secondary education. Goals and strategies have been set to provide children with free and quality primary and secondary education. MEHA introduced the School Zoning policy together with full transport assistance to ensure easier access to educational institutions, and programmes like Matua have been launched to assist former dropouts to complete their education. To improve access to education for children in rural and remote areas, MEHA placed more importance on distance learning. The tuition grants that previously went mostly to large urban schools were revised according to factors like the distance of the school from urban areas, means of transportation and availability of utilities (UNICEF, 2017).

Opportunities for collaboration

Even though substantial progress has been made in increasing access to ECCE, almost 20 per cent of pre-school-age children remain out of school. The delivery of quality educational services to rural and maritime communities is constrained by the remoteness of those communities. Even though the government is trying to overcome geographical challenges through improvements in the telecommunications network, more investment is needed in order to provide equal access to IT infrastructure, laboratories, libraries, qualified teachers and learning resources and improve enrolment in the education system, retention and completion rates and children's educational attainment. There is a genuine need to introduce technology-infused classrooms to increase student engagement and motivation and accelerate learning. Modern forms of ICTs need to be integrated into the education system as a tool for distance and open learning and as a means of communication and reaching students and schools located in remote zones.

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CHAPTER

3

Kiribati:
Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific

Executive Summary

The Government of Kiribati is committed to building the country's future by providing quality education for all children. Recent education development programmes include improvements in education policy and planning, teacher professional development initiatives, school building rehabilitation, improvements in access to and participation in education for all children in Kiribati.

The *Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey for 2018–2019*, published by the Kiribati National Statistics Office, states that 95 per cent of children in Kiribati attended the first grade of primary school in 2019. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data for 2017, the gross enrolment rate for primary education was 101.3 and the net enrolment rate was 94.7 per cent (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020).

The gender parity index for primary education was 1.0 in 2019, indicating that participation for girls in education was less than for boys. Conversely, the girls' participation rate exceeded that of the boys in junior secondary school and senior secondary school (the GPI was 1.4 in 2019) (National Statistics Office, 2019).

While participation rates at the primary level look promising, the low junior secondary and senior secondary completion rates (78 per cent and 12.8 per cent, respectively) in 2019 raise serious concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system (National Statistics Office, 2019).

Interventions should target access, participation, retention and the quality of teaching and learning at all levels of education. There is also an urgent need to make the curriculum more accessible and relevant from the perspective of gender and for children with disabilities.

Country Profile: Geography and Demographics

Kiribati is made up of 33 island atolls and coral reefs; one third are in Micronesia and two thirds in the Oceanic region of Polynesia. These atolls and islands span an area of 3.5 million square kilometres of ocean in the Pacific (see Figure 11). The infertility of the coral atolls limits agricultural production on a large scale. The sandy atolls have sparse natural resources, including water, and are prone to drought. According to the *Kiribati 2017 Gender Statistics Abstract*, the population of Kiribati in 2015 was 110,136, spread out over 24 atolls. Residents' quality of life is negatively affected by poverty and low levels of education, and in addition, overcrowding in Tarawa, the capital of Kiribati, places a significant amount of pressure on the country's environmental and social resources. There are high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, and gender-based violence rates are among the highest in the Pacific, with women and girls with a disability most at risk (National Statistics Office, 2017).

Kiribati is one of the few island nations in the world that consists entirely of coral atolls, making it extremely vulnerable to climate change, which is a serious challenge for the island nation. Critical water shortages, tidal inundation, seawater intrusion, extreme heat and storms all pose a serious threat to any development gains made in Kiribati (Government of Kiribati, 2016).

Kiribati's Human Development Indicator (HDI) value for 2017 was 0.612, which puts the country in the medium human development category; it is 134 out of 189 countries and territories (UNDP, 2018). More than 80 per cent of households in Kiribati make a living through fishing. Commercial fishing also contributes to government revenues.

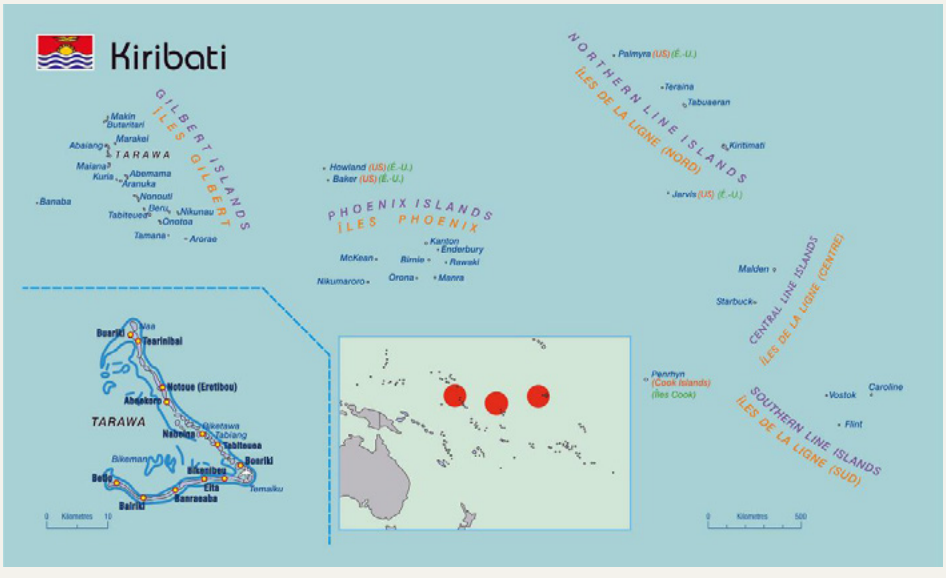

Figure 11: Map of Kiribati

Source: Mapsland (2021). (Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Licence)

The provision of public services is affected by low levels of income and high costs of service delivery. Even though the government, with the help of its development partners, has improved utilities in Tarawa, access to basic infrastructure and services such as a regular power supply, safe water and sanitation is limited, particularly in the remote and outer islands.

The population is widely dispersed across the four groups of widely scattered atolls and every aspect of developing and managing the basic education system — for example, policy implementation, professional development of teachers, monitoring of schools, reporting and communication and even supplying school resources — is constrained by timeframes, long distances and huge expenses incurred in servicing remote schools (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2016).

Despite the challenges, in recent years, as stated in the Government of Kiribati's *Kiribati Voluntary National Review and Kiribati Development Plan* mid-term review (2018), there has been significant progress in school enrolment rates and improvement in basic literacy and numeracy, especially among girls. Significant advances have also been made in geographical accessibility, teacher qualifications and free-to-access education. However, the high costs of service delivery and limited capacity of tertiary institutions to absorb school-leavers remain a challenge. Education outcomes among young male students are not showing the same level of success, with male students being less likely to progress to the next stage of schooling (Government of Kiribati, 2018).

Overview of the Education Sector in Kiribati

The Ministry of Education (MOE) manages primary, junior secondary and senior secondary education and teacher training and oversees the provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) across the country. Through the 2017 *ECCE Act*, the MOE set out requirements for the provision and operation of ECCE services throughout Kiribati.

The education system in Kiribati is divided into six stages. The first stage is ECCE, provided by the non-government sector (Churches and community groups) for children aged 5. Primary education is free and compulsory and provided by the government for six years from the age of 6 to the age of 11 (Classes 1–6). This is followed by the first three years of secondary schooling, junior secondary school (JSS), which targets children aged 12–14 (Forms 1–3) and is also free and compulsory. Following the completion of JSS, children can take the national examination to determine whether they can progress to senior secondary school (SSS). This stage of education consists of four years for young people aged 15–18 (Forms 4–7) and is delivered by both state schools and privately operated Church schools. If students wish to continue their education after SSS, they must pass examinations in Forms 6 and 7 (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

TVET in Kiribati is provided by the Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development (MLHRD) and the MOE. MLHRD directly operates two technical institutions: Kiribati Institute of Technology (KIT) and the Maritime Training Centre (MTC) (which merged with the Fisheries Training Center in 2015; MLHRD still operates the merged institutions directly). Both institutions are supported by significant Australian (KIT) and New Zealand (MTC) donor funds and so are comparatively well resourced with skilled personnel and internationally accredited programmes. The MOE administers limited TVET programmes in the secondary school system. The four Church school education authorities also play a key role in TVET in secondary schools as they manage 16 of the 19 secondary schools in Kiribati.

Special needs education in Kiribati

The Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special Needs, previously known as the Red Cross School, is the only institution catering for children with disabilities in Kiribati. It has 39 teachers and 227 registered students across preschool and primary school-ages.

The Ministry of Education has been working with this special needs school for mainstreaming of the delivery of education to the students. Of the school's former students, eight (one blind, one with impaired vision and six with impaired hearing) later attended senior secondary school, four (also with hearing impairments) attended intermediate schools and three (with mild intellectual impairments) attended regular primary schools.

Key Education Statistics

Access to and participation in schools

There has been an improvement in total enrolment, from 27,140 in 2013 to 28,565 in 2016. However, enrolment for junior secondary school decreased from 7,038 to 6,423 during the same period. Table 9 summarises school enrolment numbers in Kiribati from 2013 to 2016.

Table 9: School Enrolment in Kiribati

Education Level	Year			
	2013	2014	2015	2016
Primary	15,357	16,201	16,043	16,880
Junior Secondary	7,038	6,788	6,683	6,423
Senior Secondary	4,745	4,960	4,980	5,262
Total	27,140	27,949	27,706	28,565

Source: KEMIS 2017, adapted from Government of Kiribati (2018)

Survival rates in primary schools

As illustrated in Figure 12, the survival rate for students in Year 5 has shown improvement — from 86 per cent in 2014 to 93 per cent in 2016 — but the survival rate for Year 6 declined — from 89 per cent in 2014 to 74 per cent in 2016. The trend suggests that a proportion of primary school students drop out before completing primary education despite its being free and compulsory. The transition rate from Year 6 to Year 7 (Form 1) remained the same (98 per cent) from 2014 to 2016. Support from the Australian government through the Kiribati Education Improvement Program (KEIP) to improve school infrastructure and standards has been a significant contributing factor in improving student attendance and the retention rate (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2016).

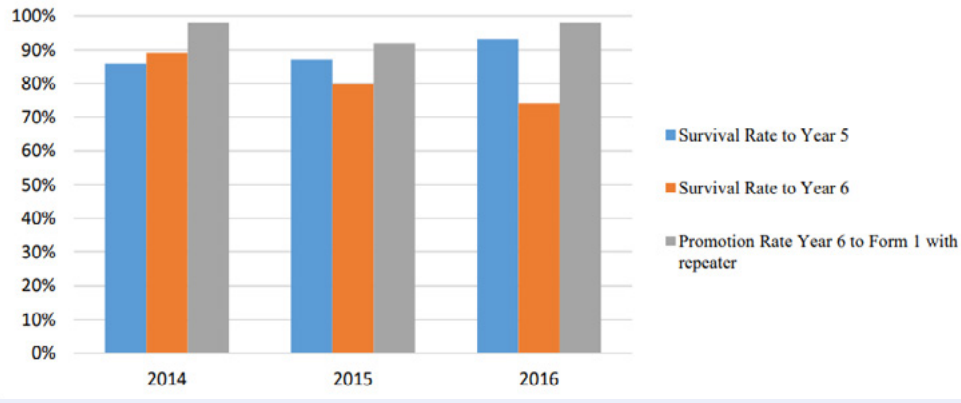

Figure 12: Survival Rates at Primary Level and Transition to Secondary Levels in Kiribati

Source: Government of Kiribati (2018)

Gender parity

As indicated in Table 10, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for schools in Kiribati was 1.0 for primary education and 1.2 for secondary education in 2015, indicating that a higher proportion of girls than boys were enrolled in the education system. Gender disparities exist in secondary school participation. In 2015, the GPI for secondary enrolment was 1.2, indicating a higher proportion of girls than boys in the official age group were participating in secondary education. (The NER for secondary schools was unavailable.)

Table 10: School Enrolment and GPI in Kiribati

Net Enrolment Rate (Primary)		Gross Enrolment Rate (Primary)		GPI	Gross Enrolment Ratio (Secondary)		GPI
Male	Female	Male	Female		Male	Female	
86%	89%	62%	101%	1.0	62%	77%	1.2

Source: National Statistics Office (2017)

Access to early childhood education

Table 11 summarises the percentage of children aged 36–59 months attending early childhood education in 2018–2019.

Table 11: Access to ECE in Kiribati

	Number of Children Aged 36–59 Months	% of Children Aged 36–59 Months Attending Early Childhood Education
Total	836	72.2
Male	424	69.3
Female	412	75.2
Urban	431	67.6
Rural	405	77.0

Source: National Statistics Office (2019)

School participation rates

Table 12 shows the participation rates of children in organised learning disaggregated by gender and location in 2018–2019 in Kiribati. The net attendance ratio (NAR), which is the official primary school-age population that attends primary school, indicates that more than 90 per cent of children attend primary school at the appropriate age. There is no significant gender disparity observed in primary school attendance.

Table 12: Participation in Organised Learning in Kiribati

	% of Children			Total (%)	NAR	Number of Children Aged 6 Years at the Beginning of the School Year
	Attending an Early Childhood Education Programme	Attending Primary Education	Not Attending an Early Childhood Education Programme or Primary Education			
Total	63.3	32.9	3.8	100.0	96.2	475
Sex						
Male	63.7	31.5	4.8	100.0	95.2	256
Female	62.9	34.5	2.7	100.0	97.3	219
Area						
Urban	63.3	34.0	2.7	100.0	97.3	215
Rural	63.3	32.0	4.7	100.0	4.7	260

Source: National Statistics Office (2019)

Attendance

Attendance in pre-primary education is important to prepare children to enter school. Table 13 shows the proportion of children in the first grade of primary school (regardless of age) who had attended any early childhood education the previous year. As of the 2018–2019 academic year, children in Kiribati enrol in primary school at age 6, junior secondary at age 12 and senior secondary at age 15.

Table 13: Progression from Preschool to Primary School in Kiribati

		Number of Children Attending First Grade of Primary School	% of Children Attending First Grade Who Attended Preschool in Previous Year
Total		536	95.2
Sex	Male	291	94.5
	Female	245	96.0
Area	Urban	271	95.8
	Rural	266	94.6

Source: National Statistics Office (2019)

Table 14 indicates the percentage of children of primary school entry age entering grade 1 (net intake rate), for the school year 2018–2019.

Table 14: NIR in Primary School in Kiribati

		Number of Children of Primary School Entry Age	% of Children of Primary School Entry Age Entering Grade 1
Total		549	90.2
Sex	Male	302	89.1
	Female	247	91.5
Area	Urban	279	90.8
	Rural	270	89.5

Source: Kiribati National Statistics Office (2019)

Table 15 shows the percentage of children of primary school-age attending primary or secondary school (adjusted net attendance ratio), percentage attending early childhood education and percentage out of school. Ratios presented in this table are "adjusted" because they include not only primary school attendance but also secondary school attendance in the numerator. The data in the table given above show that there is a slight difference in the out-of-school rate between male and female students, indicating more male than female students drop out of school. The Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development report titled *Why Are Boys Dropping Out of School in Kiribati?* (2018) highlights that boys mostly drop out due to shame and embarrassment resulting from poor grades, family issues, school punishments, financial hardships faced by their parents in sending them to school, peer pressure and personal issues.

Table 15: Primary School Attendance and OOSC in Kiribati, 2018–2019

		% of Children									Number of Children of Primary School-Age at Beginning of School Year		
		Net Attendance Ratio (adjusted)			Attending Early Childhood Education			Out of School					
		MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Total		94.8	96.9	95.8	1.4	0.8	1.1	3.8	2.3	3.1	1,365	1,286	2,651
Area	Urban	94.3	96.6	95.4	1.0	0.6	0.8	4.7	2.8	3.8	700	671	1,371
	Rural	95.3	97.3	96.2	1.9	1.0	1.4	2.8	1.8	2.3	666	615	1,280

Source: Kiribati National Statistics Office (2019)

Table 16: Junior Secondary Attendance vs OOSC, in Kiribati, 2018-2019

		% of Children									Number of Children of Junior Secondary School-Age at Beginning of School Year		
		Net Attendance Ratio (adjusted)			Attending Junior Secondary Education			Out of School					
		MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Total		73.2	87.7	80.0	12.5	7.3	10.1	14.1	4.7	9.7	550	485	1,035
Area	Urban	78.1	89.0	83.3	9.6	6.7	8.2	12.4	3.7	8.2	255	235	490
	Rural	69.0	86.5	77.0	15.1	7.8	11.8	15.1	5.7	11.8	295	250	545

Source: Kiribati National Statistics Office (2019)

Table 17: Senior Secondary Attendance vs OOSC in Kiribati, 2018–2019

		% of Children												Number of Children of Senior Secondary School-Age at Beginning of School Year		
		Net Attendance Ratio (adjusted)			Attending Junior Secondary School			Attending Primary School			Out of School					
		MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Total		46.4	64.3	54.7	9.2	7.0	8.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	44.2	28.7	37.0	634	551	1,185
Area	Urban	50.4	67.0	58.4	7.9	5.8	6.9	0.4	0.0	0.2	41.3	27.2	34.5	346	321	667
	Rural	41.6	60.5	50.0	10.7	8.6	9.8	0.0	0.2	0.1	47.6	30.6	40.1	287	231	518

Source: Kiribati National Statistics Office (2019)

Table 16 shows the net attendance ratio and out-of-school rates disaggregated by gender and location. The NAR for female students is higher than for male students, and more male than female students drop out of junior secondary school.

Ratios presented in this table are "adjusted" because they include not only lower-secondary school attendance but also attendance at higher levels in the numerator.

Table 17 shows the percentage of children of senior secondary school-age attending senior secondary school or higher (adjusted net attendance ratio), percentage attending junior secondary school and percentage out of school. The NAR for senior secondary attendance appears to be higher for female than male students. Consequently, a higher percentage of boys than girls are shown to drop out of school before completing their secondary education.

Ratios presented in this table are "adjusted" since they include not only senior secondary school attendance, but also attendance at higher levels in the numerator.

Several indicators are presented in Table 18. The gross intake rate (GIR) for girls is higher than for boys, indicating that more girls are able to reach the last

Table 18: Gross Intake, Completion and Effective Transition Rates, in Kiribati, 2018–2019

	Total	Sex		Area	
		Male	Female	Urban	Rural
Gross Intake Rate to the Last Grade of Primary School	95.7	92.5	99	91.4	100.6
Number of Children of Primary School Completion Age	409	206	203	218	192
Primary School Completion Rate	94.1	92.1	96.5	95.5	92.5
Number of Children Aged 14–16 Years	807	442	365	417	390
Effective Transition Rate to Junior Secondary School	97.6	96.3	99.1	96.7	98.6
Number of Children Who Were in the Last Grade of Primary School the Previous Year and Are Not Repeating That Grade in the Current School Year	351	185	166	175	176
Gross Intake Rate to the Last Grade of Junior Secondary School	90.7	79.3	105.5	89	92.3
Number of Children of Junior Secondary School Completion Age	293	166	127	143	150
Junior Secondary Completion Rate	78.1	68.8	88.4	83.3	70.7
Number of Adolescents Aged 17–19 Years	1,030	543	487	601	429
Senior Secondary Completion Rate	12.8	10.7	14.8	17.2	6.4
Number of Youth Aged 20–22 Years	989	495	494	583	407

Source: Kiribati National Statistics Office (2019)

grade of primary education. The same trend is noticed for junior secondary grades, where more girls are completing their education compared to boys.

Table 18 shows intake, completion and transition rates for primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools. The gross intake rate for the last grade of primary school (95.7 per cent) signifies a high degree of completion for primary education in Kiribati. This figure also shows that more female than male students are completing primary schooling. However, the completion rates decrease as the students progress to secondary education. Alarmingly, the senior secondary completion rate is significantly lower compared to primary and junior secondary completion rates.

Table 19 shows the various reasons students were not able to attend school between 2018 and 2019. According to the data in the table, the most common reasons for students' absenteeism were natural disasters (49 per cent), absence of a teacher (61 per cent) and school closure (29 per cent).

Table 19: Reasons for Not Attending School in Kiribati, 2018–2019

	Total	Sex		Area	
		Male	Female	Urban	Rural
% of Children Who in The Last Year Could Not Attend Class Due to Absence of Teacher or School Closure	29.2	29.4	28.9	35.1	23.4
Number of Children Who in the Last Year Could Not Attend Class Due to Absence of Teacher or School Closure	3,174	1,591	1,582	1,570	1,604
Natural Disasters	49	41.6	56.6	39.8	62.6
Man-Made Disasters	7.8	6.9	8.7	7.2	8.6
Teacher Strike	3.7	2.7	4.8	2.6	5.4
Other	5.3	5	5.6	5.9	4.3
Teacher Absence	60.6	67.6	53.4	67.2	50.8
Teacher Strike or Absence	62.1	68.2	55.9	68.5	52.8
Number of Children Aged 7–14 Who Could Not Attend Class in the Last Year Due to a School-Related Reason	926	468	458	551	375
% of Adult Household Members Contacting School Officials or Governing Body Representatives on Instances of Teacher Strike or Absence	25.6	21.9	30.3	21.9	32.8
Number of Children Aged 7–14 Years Who Could Not Attend Class in the Last Year Due to Teacher Strike or Absence	575	319	256	377	198

Source: Kiribati National Statistics Office (2019)

Teacher Qualifications

As illustrated in Figure 13, two types of teachers make up the teaching force in Kiribati: qualified teachers, who have attained at least the minimum academic qualifications required by the national authorities, and certified teachers, who are certified to have completed the two-year teaching certificate at the very least. The minimum academic qualification required by the national authorities for teachers has changed from Form 5 to Form 6 (from Year 11 to Year 12) for primary teachers and Form 7 (Year 13) for JSS and SSS. Certification requires a two-year teaching certificate, which can be obtained from the Kiribati Teachers College. According to the 2014 *Digest of Education Statistics* from the Kiribati Ministry of Education, the majority of teachers were qualified to work as teachers, with more than half certified to teach in 2014. More recent statistics on teacher qualifications were unavailable. Figure 13, extracted from the *Kiribati Voluntary Review and Kiribati Development Plan* mid-term review (2018), indicates that teacher qualifications for all three levels declined in 2015 but improved in 2016.

Figure 13: Proportion of Certified and Qualified Teachers in Kiribati, 2013-2016

Source: Extracted from Government of Kiribati (2018)

Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) Infrastructure

According to the *Kiribati Development Plan 2016-19* report, while the number of telephone connections has risen in recent years, Kiribati is one of the least connected countries in the world. The number of cellular subscribers has risen substantially in recent years but comprised only 16.6 per cent of the population in 2013. The number of Internet users per 100 people has multiplied dramatically, but was low at 11.5 in 2013. Most of the population either has no access to ICTs or is unable to afford the service, which is often unreliable. Telecommunications for the outer islands require upgrading, especially for the provision of Internet services. In order

to improve connectivity in the country, the Kiribati Connectivity Project, jointly funded by the Asian Development Bank and World Bank, will construct two deep-sea cables to Kiribati: one to South Tarawa (the East Micronesian Cable System) and the other to Kiritimati Island (the Southern Cross NEXT cable). Along with the recently completed reforms to the telecommunications sector and investment in outer island connectivity, the Government of Kiribati hopes these two ICT cables will lead to a dramatic improvement in Internet speed and affordability. This could be potentially transformative for the Kiribati economy and the delivery of public services. Table 20 shows some key ICT indicators for 2018–2019. The percentage of households that had Internet access was 47.2 per cent, and less than 50 per cent of men and women used the Internet during the three months preceding this survey.

Table 20: Key ICT Statistics for Kiribati, 2018–2019

Description	%
% of households that have a telephone (fixed line or mobile phone)	73.4
% of households that have a computer	31.4
% of households that have access to the Internet by any device from home	47.2
% of women aged 15–49 years who own a mobile phone	52.7
% of men aged 15–49 years who own a mobile phone	53.0
% of women aged 15–49 years who used a mobile telephone during the last 3 months	59.7
% of men aged 15–49 years who used a mobile telephone during the last 3 months	52.5
% of women aged 15–49 years who used the Internet:	
—during the last 3 months	50.2
—at least once a week during the last 3 months	37.1
% of men aged 15–49 years who used the Internet:	
—during the last 3 months	45.7
—at least once a week during the last 3 months	34.2
% of women who have carried out at least one of nine specific computer-related activities during the last 3 months:	
—aged 15–24	30.1
—aged 15–49	23.7
% of men who have carried out at least one of nine specific computer-related activities during the last 3 months:	
—aged 15–24	32.4
—aged 15–49	29.9

Source: Kiribati National Statistics Office (2019)

Challenges in Education

The high population growth in Kiribati has increased the need for resources to accommodate the rising number of students and to continue with the education sector reforms. Even though the MOE has adopted a new curriculum, the process has not been complemented by additional ongoing curriculum professional development, renewal of curricula and replacement of materials as per the new curriculum.

School dropouts

The issue of school dropouts remains one of the main concerns in the education system. Disturbingly, the *Kiribati Education Improvement Program (KEIP) Phase III Investment Design Document (2016)* report by the Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, reveals that a large proportion of children in the relevant school-age groups are not participating in basic education, there is under-enrolment in Year 1 and enrolment fluctuates during the primary school years, all of which indicates a pattern of dropout and return and low retention up to the end of JSS. Reports that informed the *2016 KEIP III Investment Design Document* reveal that over the past five years, 78 per cent of primary school-age children were enrolled and of those, only 79 per cent stay in school from Year 1 into JSS.

Survival rates for boys and girls

Survival rates for boys and girls show gender disparity, as more girls continue from Year 1 through to JSS and SSS. A recent study commissioned by the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development under the Ministry of Education and Kiribati Education Improvement Program Phase III, titled *Why Are Boys Dropping Out of School in Kiribati?* (2018), reveals that boys drop out of schools because of embarrassment or shame about falling grades, being older than the rest of the class or not having a clean uniform or proper footwear. Other reasons highlighted in the study for boys not attending classes were family issues such as pressure to complete chores at home, pressure to learn survival skills from parents, corporal punishment, boredom or difficulties in class, poor performance in assessments, a desire to work and make money, limited accessibility to schools and the cost of transportation on larger islands.

School non-completion

The issue of school non-completion in Kiribati is a major issue for both sexes. There are huge implications for girls not completing their education. Societal norms indicate that boys' social status will not be affected by dropping out and that they will be able to find work, whereas girls are on a trajectory to becoming young mothers with low status and limited opportunities for economic empowerment if they drop out of school (Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, 2017).

Participation of girls in education

Poor washing facilities have also contributed to the reduced participation of girls in education. Managing menstruation is even more challenging for girls with disabilities. Lack of awareness about menstruation and social taboos result in many girls being teased and ridiculed in schools by male students in relation to menstruation, which contributes to their absenteeism (Kiribati Ministry of Education, 2018).

Initiatives to Increase Access to and Success in Education

The 2013 *Education Act* aims to provide quality education to all by maximising every student's educational potential, thus enabling students to become effective and informed citizens and promoting compulsory education. The school curriculum is also mainstreamed for gender equality and gender-based violence responsiveness and prevention. The government has made notable progress in supporting inclusive education through free and compulsory education, JSS accessibility in all islands, provision of free basic school materials and transport services for primary and junior secondary schools.

Goal 1 of the *Kiribati Development Plan (2016–2019)* clearly stipulates the priorities for the development of education in Kiribati: "Improve the quality of education and training to provide students with the skills and capability to progress to a productive future" (Government of Kiribati, 2016, pp. 19–20). In order to achieve this goal, improving enrolment rates and teacher competencies, integrating ICT into the curriculum and improving school infrastructure by providing healthy and safe buildings and facilities are priorities for the government.

- Through the Kiribati Education Improvement Program (KEIP), the Government of Australia aims to support the Kiribati MOE to improve the quality of basic education and learning outcomes. Under its nine-year programme (2011–2019), the key interventions and initiatives have supported curriculum development and implementation; assessment; capacity building of teachers on content, pedagogy and language; rehabilitation of school infrastructure in the outer islands of South Tarawa; and improved institutional capacity at the MOE. KEIP is trialling tablet use in Year 4 classrooms to investigate the extent to which tablets are an effective teaching and learning tool for both teachers and students.
- In 2016, education was made free up until the final year of high school to ensure equitable participation by the most vulnerable groups. A subsidy scheme for school expenses is also available for students whose parents are infirm or destitute.
- Improving the lives of the disadvantaged and the most vulnerable is explicitly highlighted in the 2016-2019 Kiribati Development Plan and the Kiribati 20-Year Vision (KV20) (KV20 is Kiribati's long-term development blueprint for 2016–2036). The Government of Kiribati has made rigorous efforts in its national plans for inclusive development to ensure the provision

of education at all levels is inclusive, non-discriminatory and gender- and disability-sensitive. To further intensify its efforts towards improving access to education, the government has made junior secondary school available in all the islands, thus improving the geographical inclusion of the national curriculum up to the senior years. The government has also recently taken steps to make primary and secondary education free, which will allow families with little or no income to send their children to school (Government of Kiribati, 2018).

- The Government of Kiribati has also expanded funding support to all students who qualify for higher forms of education, providing boarding facilities for some students from the outer islands who do not have family members on the islands with senior secondary schools. This is in addition to the free education policy and subsidies for school supplies that aim to give all children access to adequate education opportunities regardless of their income level or location. The University of the South Pacific and Kiribati Institute of Technology have designed vocational programmes for dropouts from junior secondary school to provide them with various opportunities for training and development.

Concluding Remarks

The Government of Kiribati acknowledges the importance of improving access to and participation in quality education for all children in the country. Even though the government provides free primary and junior secondary education, high dropout rates, gender disparities, the quality of education, the provision of inclusive education, distance and logistical issues are some challenges that are currently hindering success.

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CHAPTER

4

Nauru:
Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific

Executive Summary

Even though education is free and compulsory in Nauru, there are major concerns regarding the accessibility of education, with high levels of non-attendance and truancy causing particular concern (UNICEF, 2017).

A further concern is related to the provisions available to children with disabilities and their inability to access schools and learning resources.

Another issue related to education is understaffing. Teacher shortages have led to an increase in pupil-teacher ratios and negatively affected the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms (UNICEF, 2017).

It is difficult to assess the true current impact of the education system and issues of accessibility, etc., because of a dearth of up-to-date data regarding attendance, dropout rates, continuity rates and completion rates for both primary and secondary education.

We do know that socio-economic and cultural barriers to accessing education are apparent in Nauru. A UNESCO report titled *Pacific Education for All 2015 Review* reveals that one of the reasons for dropout rates in Nauru is parents' attitudes to their children's education. There is also an absence of alternative pathways to education for those who are at risk of dropping out or have already dropped out.

The Government of Nauru has implemented several initiatives to increase access to education such as free lunch programmes, free transportation, engaging expatriate teachers in secondary schools and improving school infrastructure. Despite these improvements, truancy, retention rates and completion rates remain a concern.

Country Profile: Geography and Demographics

Nauru, formerly known as Pleasant Island, is the smallest country in Micronesia in the southwest Pacific, 42 kilometres south of the Equator (see Figure 14). The entire perimeter of the single phosphate rock island that forms the nation is 19 kilometres. This is the only country in the world that does not have an official capital; the airport and government offices are located in the district of Yaren. According to World Bank estimates, the population of Nauru in 2018 was 12,704 (World Bank, 2020), dispersed across the country. Nauru houses an Australian-run regional processing centre where, since 2016, 422 asylum seekers and refugees have been living (UN Human Rights Council, 2017).

Geographic isolation and limited natural resources restrict opportunities for productive economic activities, and consequently the country is heavily dependent on official development assistance and external funding. Additionally, the economy is threatened by the high cost of goods and services, poor infrastructure and adverse effects of climate change. The population of Nauru faces a number of challenges related to the environment that affect their health and well-being: natural fresh water resources are limited, many people rely on roof storage tanks to collect rainwater and the rest depend on a desalination plant for water; and almost 90 per cent of Nauru has become a wasteland because of more than 90 years of phosphate mining (Government of Nauru, 2019). The risks imposed by these factors are greater for marginalised groups, which include women, children and people with disabilities.

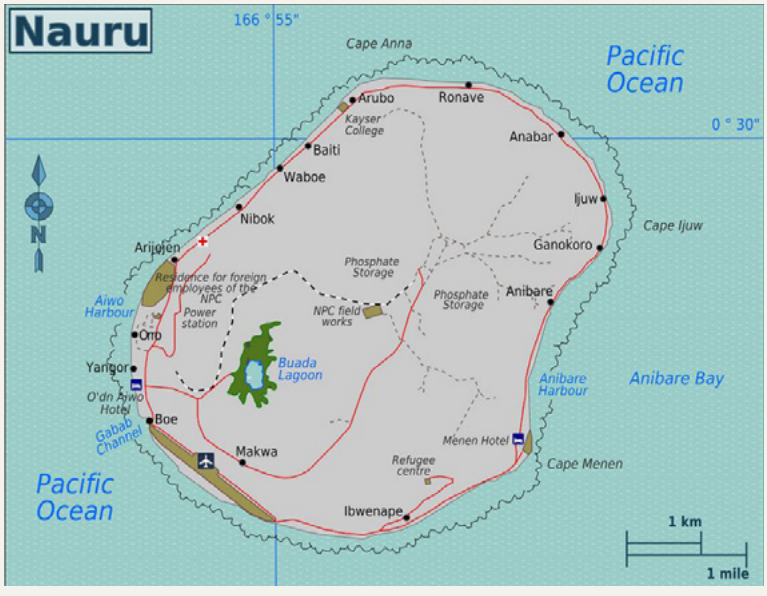


Figure 14: Map of Nauru

Source: Mapsland (2021). (Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 3.0 Licence)

Overview of the Education Sector in Nauru

Pre-primary, primary and secondary education

Education in Nauru is free and compulsory for children aged 5–18, and this privilege has recently been extended to children of refugees and asylum seekers. The language of instruction used in schools is English, although Nauruan is used by teachers for clarity when needed. The education system in Nauru has four levels: early childhood education or ECE (playschool, preschool and preparatory school), primary school (Grades/Years 1–6), middle school (Grades/Years 7–9) and secondary school (Grades/Years 10–12). A fifth level serves youth and adults and provides learning and skills development and training (Department of Education and Training Republic of Nauru, 2013). Basic literacy, preliminary and foundation-level courses that provide necessary qualifications to enter tertiary institutes and TVET institutes are provided by the University of the South Pacific, and the Australia Pacific Training Centre provides technical courses in a variety of areas to the people in Nauru (Government of Nauru, 2019).

The students are taught using the Nauru National Curriculum up to Year 10; the learning programme offered in Years 11 and 12 is the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE), accredited by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority under the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Nauru's education system is made up of 11 schools: five infant schools, four primary schools and two secondary schools. In addition, a government-run Catholic college caters for students from preschool to Year 9; they can continue their education in either of the two secondary schools in the country (Serow et al., 2016). There is only one institution for children and youth of all ages with disabilities, the Able Disable Centre (UNICEF, 2017).

The total number of students enrolled in 2017 was 3,584 — 757 girls and 1,827 boys (Australian High Commission Nauru, 2018). An annual national scholarship offers opportunities to local students to continue their education in secondary schools in Fiji after successfully completing Year 8 in lower-secondary school. Scholarships also give students an opportunity to attend schools in Queensland, Australia (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2016).

TVET and higher education

A technical and vocational education training (TVET) centre delivers a number of accredited training programmes on behalf of TAFE Queensland for Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) students who are enrolled at the secondary school, including adult students from the general public. In addition, a local University of the South Pacific campus offers post-secondary courses at preliminary, foundation and degree levels through face-to-face or online modes. A range of technical courses are also offered by the Australian Pacific Training Centre, which delivers short courses and skill-sets training programmes (Government of the Republic of Nauru, 2019).

Children with disabilities

The Able Disable Centre is an institution that looks after severely disabled children in Nauru with teachers provided by the Ministry of Education. Recent data on the number of children with disabilities who are attending schools is not available, but according to the *Disability Monograph Report* (Government Bureau of Statistics, 2015), during the period 2011–2014 there were 43 students enrolled in the centre. The report states that people with disabilities are more likely than their non-disabled peers to miss out on education.

Key Education Statistics

Out-of-school children in Nauru

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child noted in its Concluding Observations on the initial report on Nauru (2016) the high levels of student non-attendance as a major concern in secondary schools in Nauru. Reports have identified truancy as one of the main challenges facing Nauru's education system (UNICEF, 2017). The Government of Nauru has introduced several strategies to combat this issue, such as the provision of free lunches to all students. In addition, the *Education Act* of 2011 allows for prosecuting and fining parents who allow their children to play truant. Up-to-date data on attendance, dropout and persistence rates in primary and secondary schools for Nauru are limited, but estimates are provided in Table 21.

Table 21: Out-of-School Children in Nauru

		2012	2014	2016
Out-of-School Children – Primary	Total	234	31	40
	Female	101	unavailable	unavailable
	Male	133	unavailable	unavailable
Out-of-School Adolescents (15–19 years)	Total	24	68	92
	Male	unavailable	37	27
	Female	unavailable	31	65

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (n.d.)

Figure 15 shows the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for pre-primary education, which is the number of students enrolled in a given grade, regardless of their age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020). Figure 16 shows the net enrolment rate (NER) for pre-primary education, which is the total number of students of the official age group for a given level of education enrolled in any level of education.

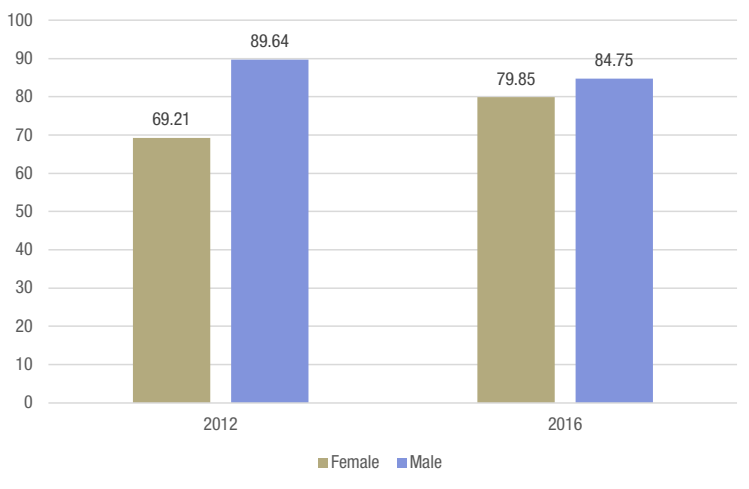


Figure 15: GER for Pre-Primary Education in Nauru, 2012–2016

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020)

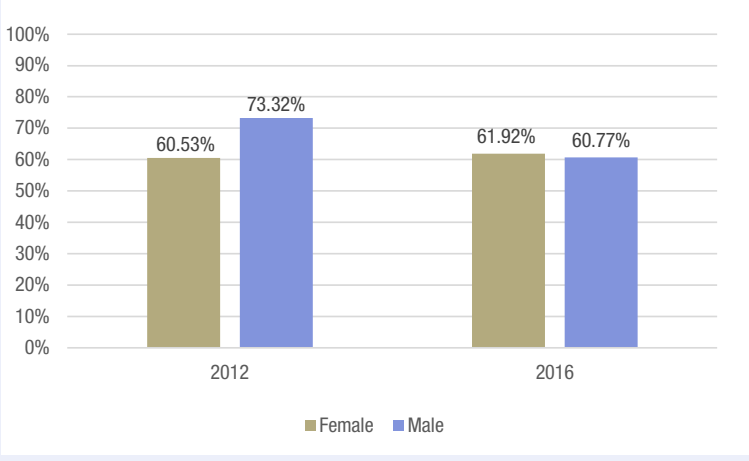


Figure 16: NER for Pre-Primary Education in Nauru, 2012–2016

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020)

The GER for pre-primary education, 79.5 per cent for 2012 and 82.32 per cent for 2016 (Figure 15), indicate that the country was unable to enrol many children in ECE education. This also suggests that there is a proportion of children who are older than the official age for pre-primary education. The NER in 2016 was 60.77 per cent for male students and 61.92 per cent for female students (Figure 16). The data reveal that while participation rates for girls have slightly improved since 2012, the percentage of boys who enrolled in pre-primary education decreased in 2016. The difference between the GER and NER shows that there is a large

difference between the participation of boys and girls in pre-primary education, with a higher proportion of girls than boys participating in pre-primary education.

Gross enrolment ratio and net enrolment rate: Primary education, 2012–2016

Even though the GER for primary education increased between 2012 and 2016 for both male and female students, more male than female students were enrolled in primary schools. The gender disparities in education, especially in secondary schools, call for urgent measures to address the barriers to boys' participation in primary education.

As indicated in Table 22, in 2016, the GER for primary schools was 126.43 per cent, indicating that the enrolment of children falling outside of the official age group is an issue in Nauru. GER can at times exceed 100 per cent due to the inclusion of overaged and underaged students and repeaters (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020). The NER for 2016 was low at 93.7 per cent, which indicates that the participation rate in primary education was low.

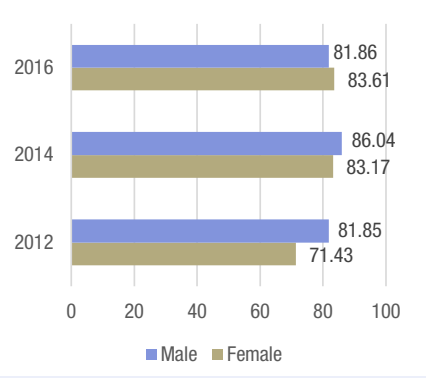
Table 22: GER for Primary Education in Nauru, 2012–2016

	2012	2014	2016
Total	99.77	116.46	126.43
Female	102.77	111.59	123.17
Male	96.8	121.26	129.67
Net Enrolment Rate (%)			
Total	80.18	95.87	93.7
Female	82.62		
Male	77.78		

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020)

Gross enrolment ratio: Secondary education, 2012–2016

The following graphs show the gross enrolment ratio for secondary education for 2012 to 2016. There is not a huge difference between GER and NER for secondary education in Nauru. The NER for 2016 shows that slightly more female students than male were enrolled in secondary education, indicating that more male than female students drop out before completing their secondary education.



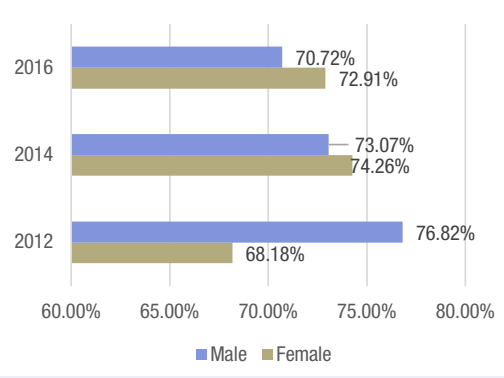


Figure 17: GER and NER for Secondary Education in Nauru

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (n.d.)

Progress and completion

Table 23 summarises progress and completion rates in Nauru.

Table 23: Progress and Completion Rates in Nauru

	Total
Proportion of Pupils Starting Grade 1 Who Reach Last Grade of Primary (%)	67% (2014)
Repetition Rate	0.1% (2014)
Participation Rate in Organised Learning (one year before the official primary entry age)	71.2% (2014)

Source: Pacific Community (n.d.)

Teachers' Qualifications

Overall, the percentage of qualified teachers in Nauru has increased since 2014, as shown in Table 24. The Ministry of Education and Training is addressing the need to increase the number of qualified teachers in Nauru with the help of a residential teacher education project. Under this project, 33 teachers have attained an associate degree in teaching, 13 at ECE level, 15 at primary level and 5 at secondary level. A few of the graduates are upgrading their qualifications by pursuing degree programmes.

Table 24: Overview of Teachers in Nauru, 2014–2017 (EMIS 2018)

Year	Total Number of Teachers	% of Teachers Who Are Expatriates	% of Teachers Who Are Qualified
2014	112	33%	73%
2015	105	44%	71%
2016	115	55%	80%
2017	117	49%	87%
2018	125	42%	82%

Source: Adapted from Australian High Commission Nauru (2018)

Teacher qualifications were identified as an area of concern in the Department of Education's 2011 annual report as approximately only 9 per cent of teachers were recorded as having a degree, 6.4 per cent a diploma and 50 per cent a certificate; about 34.4 per cent had no formal qualifications. The UNICEF *Situation Analysis of Children in Nauru* report (UNICEF, 2017) states that there is a lack of teacher training opportunities in Nauru, and that the only consistent source of in-country teacher training has been the Pacific Pre-School Teacher's Certificate, which is offered by the USP Campus. According to the same report, as a result, many teachers are only qualified in Pacific Pre-School teaching and there is a shortage of teachers qualified at higher levels. This would explain why many teachers teach without holding relevant qualifications.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Infrastructure in Nauru

Table 25 provides an overview of access to ICT services in 2010, 2017 and 2018.

Table 25: Access to ICT Services in Nauru

Fixed Broadband Subscriptions (per 100 people)	1,475 (2018)
Fixed Broadband Subscriptions (total number)	950 (2010)
Secure Internet Servers (per 1 million people)	78.7 (2018)
Individuals Using the Internet (total number)	57 (2017)
Mobile Cellular Subscriptions (per 100 people)	10,000 (2017)

Source: World Bank (2020a)

The Government of Nauru has an agreement with international mobile operator Digicel Nauru to provide telecom services in the country until 2024. Digicel Nauru owns and operates eight mobile towers that provide mobile and Wi-Fi services for almost 10,000 mobile subscriptions. The island has almost full mobile coverage, with 75 per cent on 4G LTE and the balance being upgraded to 3G. The international Internet capacity in Nauru is currently estimated at 360 megabits

per second (Mbps). A government-controlled Internet service provider called Cenpac purchases all Internet capacity from Digicel and provides Internet services to government and state-owned enterprises. A domestic fibre-optic cable donated by the Japanese government provides connectivity to government departments, the hospital and most of the schools on the island. The government plans to expand coverage to the whole island.

The cost of Internet access is high in Nauru, and access can only be purchased through prepaid schemes at various data storage capacities such as 3G/4G LTE, WiMAX and Wi-Fi hotspots. The Government of Nauru is committed to improving the national ICT infrastructure in the country through the Nauru National Broadband Plan and Nauru ICT Strategy.

Challenges in Education

One of the key priorities for the Government of Nauru is to improve educational outcomes under the National Sustainable Development Strategy for 2005–2025. Even though Nauru has made significant progress towards achieving many of its education-related goals since 2008 — such as improving school buildings, improving the curriculum, prioritising teacher training and improving access to education — there are still some barriers that need to be addressed in order to achieve universal education for all. Even though education is free in Nauru, achieving universal education is hindered by low school attendance rates, especially among vulnerable and marginalised groups, teacher shortages, teacher attrition and school dropouts.

Accessibility in education for children with disabilities

One of the concerns raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2016) was the issue of accessibility in education, especially relating to the reasonable adjustments available for children with disabilities in the education system. Public buildings and transport are not accessible for children with disabilities. The UNICEF *Situation Analysis of Children in Nauru* (2017) reports that in 2005, only six children were attending the Able Disable Centre because of the lack of availability of suitable/accessible transport options to take children with disabilities between home and school. The report also highlighted that the quality of education provided by the special needs school is an area of concern, as that year only one of the school's three teachers possessed teaching qualifications in ECE but had not had training in special education to allow them to give specialised teaching assistance to children with disabilities. Another issue facing the education system is access to education for the children of refugees and asylum-seekers. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in their Concluding Observations in 2016, highlighted that refugee and asylum-seeking children do not have adequate access to full-time education, with those attending often dropping out prematurely as a result of bullying and stigmatisation by pupils and teachers (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2016b).

Teacher qualifications and teacher shortages

Another challenge facing the education system in Nauru is a shortage of teaching staff which leads to higher pupil-teacher ratios which in turn affects the quality of teaching (UNICEF, 2017). The Department of Education has implemented a number of initiatives to address the issue of deficits in teacher qualifications — such as capacity building and upskilling programmes for teachers — with the collaboration of the University of New England and the University of the South Pacific (Department of Education and Training, 2011). As a result, a number of teachers have already graduated from the University of New England with an associate degree in Pacific Education.

High teacher attrition rates

High teacher attrition rates also hinder development in the education sector. The high turnover in teachers who leave teaching positions to seek employment in other sectors creates a capacity gap that is filled by recruiting teachers from overseas (United Nations, 2016). The Government of Nauru believes that improving the quality of teachers will lead to improved student learning, and for this reason, the Education Strategic Plan 2017–2021 identifies teacher education as a major area of work and notes that a Teacher Attraction and Retention Committee (TARC) will be established to review the issues surrounding teacher attraction and retention, and provide recommendations on areas such as pay, study leave, performance-based bonuses and how to attract more male teachers. To further promote the sustainability of teacher education, developing and implementing retention strategies for quality teachers is critical. The government hopes to reduce the reliance on regional expatriate teachers who are recruited to counteract the shortage of local teaching staff.

Issues related to school enrolments in education in Nauru

The Nauru *Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda* (Government of the Republic of Nauru, 2019) highlighted the high rate of school dropouts as a major area of concern for the education system in Nauru. According to the report, the total number of students who were enrolled in school in 2016 was 3,499, out of which 1,789 were boys and 1,710 girls. There was an increase of 11 per cent in the total enrolment rate in 2018, with a 10 per cent increase in primary enrolment and 14 per cent increase in secondary enrolment. The report further highlights that the primary completion rate in 2017 was 85 per cent, compared to the secondary completion rate of 56 per cent, which shows a high attrition rate in the education system after Year 6. The 2018 enrolment figures reveal that almost 13 per cent of Year 6 and 7 students did not enrol at the next level in 2019 (Government of the Republic of Nauru, 2019).

The same report states that students may leave the Nauru education system and complete their schooling overseas. Fluctuations in the number of students enrolled may be due to the enrolment and subsequent departure of refugees' or asylum seekers' children in the Nauru school system. Enrolment numbers in the

education sector have improved in general over the years, but retention, pass and truancy rates remain a huge concern. The average attendance rate across the education system for all levels of schooling was 54 per cent in 2016, and 44 per cent in both 2017 and 2018 (Government of the Republic of Nauru, 2019).

Nauru is heavily dependent on rainfall for its water supply, but lack of rainfall and a series of droughts and extreme climatic hazards such as El Niño have diminished Nauru's already limited water supply. Schools in Nauru are at times forced to close down owing to there being no water for drinking and flushing toilets (UNICEF, 2017).

Initiatives to Increase Access to and Success in Education

The Government of Nauru has introduced a number of policies to improve school attendance such as a free lunch programme, free transport, engaging expatriate teachers to teach in Nauru, increasing expenditure to improve school buildings and facilities and implementing the Nauru Education Assistance Trust (NEAT) scheme in 2016. The NEAT scheme was introduced by the government to reduce truancy and increase school attendance. Under the scheme, students are offered AUD5 for each day they attend school, payable after graduation at the end of Year 12. The students can only use the money for productive purposes, such as starting a business or buying a home (Government of the Republic of Nauru, 2020). There was an increase in enrolment during the early days of the scheme, but the numbers have since dropped again (Government of the Republic of Nauru, 2019).

Concluding Remarks

Over the past decade, the Education Department in Nauru has implemented a range of strategies to strengthen and improve its capacity and the entire education system. Its achievements in this regard have been increasing the number of qualified teachers, offering access to the Queensland-based Certificate of Education for teachers at the senior-secondary level, recruiting expatriate teachers to counter the issue of teacher shortages and increasing access to education.

Furthermore, to reduce truancy rates and increase attendance in schools, the Government of Nauru has introduced a number of initiatives such as the NEAT scheme, which offers free lunches to students and the payment of AUD5 to every child who goes to school each day.

Despite these initiatives, truancy, retention and pass rates remain a concern.

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CHAPTER

5

Papua New Guinea:
Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific

Executive Summary

Papua New Guinea's commitment to improving access to and the affordability of education is reflected in its National Education Plan 2015–2019. The government has made notable investments in education since 2012, particularly in increasing access to education in the elementary, primary and secondary sectors through its Tuition Fee Free (TFF) policy.

According to *Papua New Guinea's Voluntary National Review 2020 Progress of Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals*, the introduction of TFF led to an increase in student enrolments from 1.5 million in 2010 to around 2 million in 2014, and net enrolment grew from 53 per cent in 2011 to 68 per cent in 2014 (Department of National Planning and Monitoring, 2020). According to the same report, since the introduction of TFF, more pupils have finished the final grade in primary school and secondary enrolment has increased. Despite these developments in education, critical issues that continue to hinder the country's progress towards achieving its education and SDG-related targets include school dropouts, high student-teacher ratios, lack of learning resources for students, lack of current learning facilities for existing students, deteriorating school infrastructure, student absenteeism, teacher absenteeism — especially among teachers posted in rural areas — lack of teaching resources and an inadequate supply of teachers, especially in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education.

Accessibility to schools is a particularly serious concern in rural communities, where children walk long distances to reach schools because of the absence of transportation, which affects dropout, retention and completion rates, especially for girls, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged as well as children with disabilities. Even though the *National Disability Policy 2015–2020* (United Nations, 2020)

provides a framework for more support related to disability at a national level, school accessibility for children with disabilities in rural areas is still a challenge, as most of the disability centres are in urban areas.

A serious challenge that needs greater attention is the high attrition rates in the Papua New Guinea education system, as many students drop out of school before completing Grade 12. According to the Papua New Guinea National Education Plan 2020–2029, more than 360,000 students entered the preparatory class in 2007 but only 37,000 of those had reached Grade 12 in 2020.

Despite the significant improvements in education in the past few years, more needs to be done by the education sector to improve access, retention, quality, equity and management to address the remaining challenges.

Country Profile: Geography and Demographics

Papua New Guinea is considered the largest and most populated country of all the Pacific island countries. It occupies the eastern half of the West Pacific island of New Guinea, together with the smaller islands of New Britain, New Ireland, the Autonomous Region of Bougainville and another 600 or so smaller islands and atolls (see Figure 18). Papua New Guinea's young and fast-growing population was estimated at 8.6 million in 2018 (World Bank, 2018). Thirty-six per cent of the population is under the age of 14 and the national fertility rate is 3.6 (UNFPA, 2020). Port Moresby, the capital, has an estimated population of 400,000.

Figure 18: Map of Papua New Guinea

Source: Mapsland (2021) (Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 3.0 Licence)

Home to more than 200 cultures who speak more than 850 languages between them, Papua New Guinea is considered one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the Pacific (UNDP, 2020). English is the country's official language, but only 2 per cent of the population speaks it. Pidgin (a mixture of English, German and other languages) is spoken throughout the country (Rena, 2014).

Papua New Guinea is ranked 154 out of 188 in the 2016 Human Development Index and is a lower-middle-income country. According to the UNDP Human Development Report (UNDP, 2015), Papua New Guinea is also one of the most rural countries in the world, with less than 13 per cent of the population living in urban areas. A 2020 UNDP report highlights that 87 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, many of which are isolated from each other by rugged mountains, rivers, dense forests and seas. Ninety per cent of Papua New Guinea's provinces are only accessible by air or sea (UNDP, 2020).

According to the Asian Development Bank (2020), the gross domestic product growth for Papua New Guinea was estimated at -0.8 per cent in 2018, which is considered low compared to most Pacific countries. A high proportion (75 per cent) of the rural population relies on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood and approximately 40 per cent live on less than USD1.25 per day (UNDP, 2020).

Health and nutrition indicators are poor. Maternal mortality is 215 per 100,000 live births and the under-5 mortality rate is 61 per 1,000 live births. Most people do not have access to safe drinking water or sanitation.

Papua New Guinea was ranked 143 out of 188 countries on the gender inequality index (UNDP, 2015). Gender-based violence is high, and rates are worse in remote and rural areas where women and youth are at risk of being further marginalised despite the ratification of six core human rights treaties over the years (United Nations, 2017).

The country has some of the highest mobile and broadband costs because of the widely dispersed population and the mountainous terrain (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020). The World Bank data available for 2017 indicate that only 11 per cent of the population (8,438,029) was connected to the Internet (World Bank, 2018); the mobile cellular subscription rate is 47.6 per cent (Department of National Planning and Monitoring, 2020).

Overview of the Education Sector in Papua New Guinea

The Ministry of Education is made up of the National Department of Education, the Teaching Service Commission and the Office of Libraries and Archives and looks after the education sector. It is responsible for teacher education and registration, teacher inspection, school registration, curriculum, assessments and the overall management of the education sector in the country (National Department of Education Papua New Guinea, 2019). Almost half of the education services are delivered by Church organisations while provincial administrations have responsibility for establishing, building and maintaining schools.

The education system in Papua New Guinea consists of 11 years of free elementary and primary education. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) for children under 6 years old is currently regulated by the Department for Community Development and Religion (DfCDR), with the involvement of the National Department of Education in the development of early childhood development standards, curriculum and teacher training. The Grade 10 examination is used to assess readiness for promotion from lower-secondary to higher-secondary school and the Grade 12 examination is used for the admission process to higher education. Technical and vocational training and education (TVET) is available from Grade 9 at vocational centres. Alternative education is provided by the Flexible and Open Distance Education (FODE) institution for upper-primary and secondary distance education and matriculation. "It is a School at home, where students study the same secondary education curriculum in their own time, in their own homes, and at their own pace" (Department of Education, 2020a, p. 8).

The Government of Papua New Guinea has made major progress towards improving primary enrolment rates, but the learning achievements have been low (Department of National Planning and Monitoring, 2020). The government increased its funding for education from 20 per cent in 2010 to 23.7 per cent in 2017. Another government commitment towards making basic education accessible to all is the Tuition Fee Free (TFF) policy, which provides financial assistance to schools to implement school plans and supports provinces and districts in upgrading school infrastructure. The TFF has resulted in an increase in enrolment rates at all levels of education (Department of National Planning and Monitoring, 2020).

The latest statistics gathered from the *COVID-19 Education Emergency Response and Recovery Plan as of 4th of May 2020* reveal that there are 2,445,968 students enrolled in 1,128 early childhood centres, 8,404 elementary schools, 3,874 primary schools, 289 secondary and national high schools, 19 teacher colleges, 10 technical business colleges, 133 vocational schools, 22 Flexible Open Distance Education (FODE) Centres, 24 Inclusive Education Resource Centres (IERC) and 113 permitted schools (Department of Education, 2020c). Sixteen colleges and six universities make up the tertiary sector in Papua New Guinea. Table 26 (below) shows the total school population by sectors for 2020.

Table 26: School Population by Sectors in Papua New Guinea

School Level	Number of Schools	Male Students	Female Students	Total
Early Childhood Education	1,128	37,800	37,800	75,600
Elementary	8,404	531,547	483,409	1,014,956
Primary	3,874	563,666	472,574	1,036,240
Secondary/High Schools	283	120,997	81,926	202,923
National High Schools	6	1,991	1,275	3,266
Teacher Colleges	19	3,415	3,133	6,548

School Level	Number of Schools	Male Students	Female Students	Total
Technical Business Colleges	10	4,952	2,186	7,138
Vocational	133	27,770	13,546	41,316
Inclusive Education Resource Centres	24	5,415	4,336	9,751
FODE	22	10,860	8,750	19,610
Permitted Schools *	113	16,267	13,181	29,448
	14,010	**1,324,536**	**1,121,432**	**2,445,968**

* These are private education providers not affiliated with the National Education System but that provide education with permitted status from the DoE — the permitted status distinguishes them from other private schools that operate independently in Papua New Guinea

Source: Department of Education Papua New Guinea (2020c)

Access to education

As illustrated in Figure 19, there has been an increase in enrolment over the past decade. This is due to rapid growth in the number of elementary and primary schools, which has led to a decrease in the number of out-of-school children, from 45 per cent in 2011 to 25 per cent in 2015.

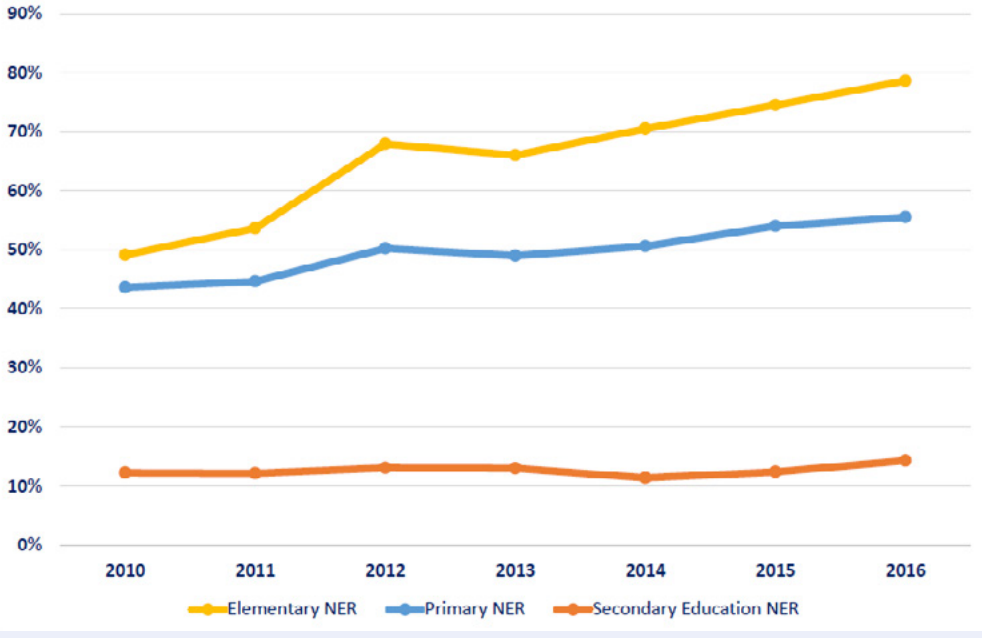

Figure 19: Net Enrolment Rate by Sector and Year in Papua New Guinea, 2010–2016

Source: 2010–2016 EMIS, extracted from Department of Education Papua New Guinea (2019)

The growth in NER for the elementary sector shows an improvement in age-appropriate enrolment from 2011 to 2016. However, the NER for the primary and secondary sectors is still a concern, as enrolment in these two sectors remains low, especially in secondary schools.

Key Education Statistics

The following tables provide summaries of key education statistics.

Table 27: Enrolment in Pre-Primary Education in Papua New Guinea, 2016

Gross Enrolment Rate (GER)	Total	43.16
	Female	42.84
	Male	43.46
Net Enrolment Rate	Total	18.29
	Female	18.37
	Male	18.21

Source: 2010–2016 EMIS, extracted from Department of Education Papua New Guinea (2019)

Table 28: Enrolment in Primary Education in Papua New Guinea, 2012, 2016

		2012	2016
Gross Enrolment Rate (GER)	Total	101.88	108.55
	Female	95.68	103.57
	Male	107.69	113.21
Net Enrolment Rate	Total		73.65
	Female		71.01
	Male	71.00	76.13

Source: 2010–2016 EMIS, extracted from Department of Education Papua New Guinea (2019)

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics data for gross enrolment rate (GER) for pre-primary education shown in Table 27 is almost the same for male and female students in 2016. The GER for 2016 was below 50 per cent, indicating very low participation of pupils in pre-primary education. However, for the primary level (Table 28), the GER increased from 101 per cent in 2012 to 108 per cent in 2016. Similarly, the primary net enrolment rate (NER) showed an increase from 71 per cent in 2012 to 76 per cent in 2016, indicating an increase in the number of students who enrolled in primary education.

Table 29: Enrolment in Secondary Education in Papua New Guinea, 2012, 2016 (%)

		2012	2016
Gross Enrolment Rate – Secondary	Total	38.67	47.50
	Female	33.03	39.86
	Male	43.99	54.68
Net Enrolment Rate – Secondary	Total		32.38
	Female		29.19
	Male		35.39

Source: 2010–2016 EMIS, extracted from Department of Education Papua New Guinea (2019); World Bank (2020)

For secondary education, even though the GER increased from 38.67 per cent in 2012 to 47.5 per cent in 2016, the total NER was below 40 per cent, indicating that almost 60 per cent of the students did not enrol in upper-secondary education.

Table 30: Out-of-School Children at Primary Level in Papua New Guinea

		2016
Out-of-School Children at Primary Level	Total	86,115
	Female	58,959
	Male	27,156
Out-of-School Adolescents (10–19 years)	Total	52,905
	Female	34,638
	Male	18,267

Source: 2010–2016 EMIS, extracted from Department of Education Papua New Guinea (2019); World Bank, 2020

The out-of-school figures given in Table 30 (above) show that in 2016, a total of 86,115 students of primary school-age were out of school, while 52,905 adolescents, students of secondary school level, dropped out of school. (The reasons behind students dropping out of schools are explained further down this report.) The progress and completion rates are also low in Papua New Guinea, as seen in Table 31 (below).

Table 31: Progress and Completion Rates in Papua New Guinea

	Male	Female	Total
Percentage of Repeaters in Primary Schools (%)	8.9	8.88	8.92 (2016)
Gross Intake Ratio into the Last Grade of Primary School (%)	77.12	82.37	71.53 (2016)
Primary to Secondary Transition Rate (%)			61% (2016)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020)

Teacher Qualifications

The *Education Sector Plan Implementation Grant & Multiplier Boosting Education Standards Together (BEST PNG) Program* (Department of Education Papua New Guinea, 2019) reports that elementary teachers are required to have a certificate, primary teachers a diploma and secondary teachers a degree in order to teach in Papua New Guinea. The proportion of trained teachers in elementary, primary and secondary schools is low. Secondary teachers are not necessarily required to have a degree in the subject that they teach and a tracer study found that 38 per cent of recent graduates were teaching a subject they were not trained in (Department of Education Papua New Guinea, 2019).

Table 32: Qualified Teachers by Sex and Sector in Papua New Guinea

	Male	Female	Total	GPI
Elementary	50.5%	49.0%	49.9%	0.97
Primary	76.3%	80.1%	78.1%	1.05
Secondary	59.1%	64.4%	61.1%	1.09

Source: EMIS, 2016, extracted from Department of Education Papua New Guinea (2019)

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Infrastructure in Papua New Guinea

The following table summarises ICT infrastructure in Papua New Guinea.

Table 33: ICT Infrastructure in Papua New Guinea

Individuals Using the Internet (% of population)	11% (2019)
Secure Internet Servers	498 (2019)
Fixed Broadband Subscriptions (per 100 people)	0.21 (2017)
Individuals Using the Internet (% of population)	11% (2017)
Fixed Telephone Subscription	158,000 (2017)
Mobile Cellular Subscriptions	4,018,000 (2017)

Source: World Bank (2020)

Papua New Guinea faces several telecommunications challenges. According to World Bank data (World Bank, 2019), the Internet penetration rate of 11 per cent means that most of the population in Papua New Guinea remains unconnected. Internet prices are too high, limiting access and imposing indirect costs on all levels of society. Entry-level Internet packages appear to be above the International Telecommunications Union's (ITU) benchmark required to accelerate Internet penetration (i.e., less than 3–5 per cent of monthly average income). Papua New Guinea was ranked 163 out of 169 countries by the ITU in 2013 in terms of Internet affordability. Internet connectivity in Papua New Guinea is also slow and unreliable. Despite economic deregulation and the rollout of Digicel's network in 2008, which connected millions of Papua New Guinea citizens to the Internet, service outages are common and penetration rates remain among the lowest in the world (Lawrence, 2017). The demand for services is inhibited by factors such as very low to almost non-existent fixed broadband penetration and limited 3G/4G services across the country.

With funding through a loan from China, the Government of Papua New Guinea is constructing a domestic cable that is expected to link many of the provinces. The launch of the Kacific satellite in 2019 was expected to offer increased bandwidth and affordable and reliable Internet access to rural communities in Papua New Guinea (Watson, 2020).

Challenges in Education

Transition rates

Despite the government's efforts to improve access to education, there are salient challenges affecting progress and development in the education sector — for example, a shortage of schools to meet demand in the secondary sector; the direct and indirect costs of education; the specific challenges faced by female students and children with disabilities in attending and completing basic education; fewer females enrolling in higher grades; low primary-to-secondary transition rates, especially the transition rates from the last grade of primary school to the first grade of secondary school (see Table 34), high dropout rates at Grade 8–9 and Grade 10–11 transition points and high repetition rates in lower grades (Department of Education Papua New Guinea, 2019).

Table 34: Transition Rates by Sector and Sex in Papua New Guinea

	Grade 8–9	Grade 10–11
Male	61%	48%
Female	57%	44%
Total	59%	47%
GPI	0.92	0.91

Source: EMIS, 2016, extracted from Department of Education Papua New Guinea (2019)

Teachers' qualifications

The challenges faced by the teaching sector include a lack of specialist teachers, especially in Maths and Science, qualified teachers at all levels and in-service professional development training opportunities for teachers. Papua New Guinea's population growth stands at 3 per cent per annum, resulting in a high teacher-pupil classroom ratio, with sometimes as many as 70 to 80 students in a class, placing a strain on teachers who are burned out from the large class sizes.

Gender disparities in education

According to the *2011–2012 PNG Country Gender Assessment* report, considerable progress has been made in increasing school enrolment, but gender disparities persist. The report states that net primary enrolment increased from 53 per cent in 2007 to 75 per cent in 2010, but female enrolment continues to lag behind male enrolment (73 per cent versus 77 per cent). Completion rates to Grade 8 remain low, especially for girls: in 2007 only 59 per cent of girls completed a full primary cycle versus 64 per cent of boys. For secondary education, the gross enrolment rate for female students was only 39 per cent in 2010, compared with 50 per cent for male students. The gender gap is especially salient among teenagers (ages 15–17), with one in six girls never having attended school compared to only one in 14 boys (Asian Development Bank, 2012).

Children with disabilities

According to the *Education Sector Plan Implementation Grant & Multiplier Boosting Education Standards Together (BEST PNG) Program* (Department of Education Papua New Guinea, 2019), children in Papua New Guinea are mostly excluded from school, especially in rural areas and in older grades, because of lack of awareness of the rights of children with disabilities; teachers with inadequate disability-inclusive education training; lack of appropriate learning resources for children with disabilities; lack of accessible infrastructure in schools; lack of disability services such as early intervention services; and lack of inclusive education curricula and assessments. Even though there are Inclusive Education Resource Centres (IERCs) in all the provinces, they are constrained by a lack of resources from conducting outreach activities in schools and communities for inclusive education support and community-based rehabilitation.

Infrastructural challenges

The provision of quality education and the flow of information in Papua New Guinea is challenging because of the large population, rugged terrain and weak infrastructure of the country. Some regions are not accessible by road. Internet penetration is low and the broadband Internet network is slow, especially in rural areas (World Bank, 2015).

School dropouts

Achieving Universal Education for a Better Future Universal Basic Education Plan 2010–2019 reports that children drop out of school for a number of reasons, such as financial barriers, lack of educational teaching and learning materials, and poor learning environments that cause children to lose interest. Moreover, the same report states that poor school infrastructure such as inadequate water and sanitation facilities or insufficient privacy can result in children, especially girls, dropping out of school (Department of Education Papua New Guinea, 2009).

Teacher absenteeism is another factor that affects student retention in school. It is reported that teachers are frequently absent from classes, and in some schools, they may be absent for two to three days a week or even for several weeks. Tribal conflicts also affect children's schooling. Such conflicts are common in the highland provinces and schools often close down when they happen. When the schools reopen, a few children do not re-enrol (Department of Education Papua New Guinea, 2009).

Hygiene-related challenges faced by girls in Papua New Guinea

Girls in Papua New Guinea face menstrual hygiene-related challenges, especially in primary schools, because of a lack of washing facilities such as water and clean toilets (UNICEF, 2019). A focus group discussion carried out in four Papua New Guinea districts in 2016 as part of a WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) study conducted by UNICEF revealed that out of 4,700 schools studied, over half did not have access to a basic water supply and 70 per cent lacked gender-segregated toilets, meaning female students had no privacy when using toilets to manage their menstruation. Adolescent girls in Papua New Guinea are likely to miss school every month because schools do not have adequate facilities to let them manage their periods. According to a UNICEF report (n.d.), only 8 per cent of schools in Papua New Guinea practise menstrual hygiene management and only 10 per cent of schools have soap for handwashing.

Initiatives to Increase Access to and Success in Education

Tuition Fee Free (TFF) policy

The Tuition Fee Free (TFF) policy was introduced in 2012 by the Government of Papua New Guinea in order to reduce financial barriers to school attendance and to attempt to decentralise control of education funding (Walton et al., 2017).

Government financing for education

The government continues to show a strong commitment to improving children's education. This commitment is reflected in increased spending on education, from 20 per cent in 2010 to almost 24 per cent in 2017 (Global Partnership for Education, 2020).

Accelerating Girls Education (AGE) Initiative

The Community-Based Education Advocates (CBEA) programme is part of the Accelerating Girls Education (AGE) initiative that was introduced in Papua New Guinea in 2003 to remove gender disparities in primary and secondary education. It was introduced in three highland provinces: Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands and Simbu. As part of this initiative, girls who have dropped out of the education system are encouraged to return to school. The girls may have dropped out due to lack of school fees, becoming pregnant and not being given the opportunity to return to school after giving birth, violence or abuse, or parental reluctance to send girls to school (Chambers, 2011). The initiative saw a total of 396 girls return to school in the Eastern Highlands Province between 2006 and 2009.

Second-chance education opportunities

- A news article titled "Villagers in Papua New Guinea Pool Resources to Pay Unaffordable School Fees" by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (2005) states that most girls in Papua New Guinea are forced to drop out of school because they are unable to pay their school fees. In the highlands, school fees present a financial burden for many families, especially those who do subsistence farming and have little or no cash income. To solve the increasing problem of low enrolment and retention, Church elders, community leaders, parents and teachers came up with the School Fees Akepile initiative which encourages members of the community to contribute to the school fees of all the children in the village. The initiative helps underprivileged children, orphans and children with poor and disabled parents to pay their school fees and remain in school.
- A second chance to get an education in Papua New Guinea is provided by the Jiwaka Literacy Centre (JLC), which offers bridging courses for OOSC in Papua New Guinea with support from UNICEF. It is a private non-formal school that provides OOSC with an opportunity to continue their education and finally enter formal education. JLC has established linkages with nearby formal schools that will accept children from it when they are ready to be mainstreamed back into formal education (UNICEF, n.d.).
- To solve the problem of OOSC, the National Department of Education, with UNICEF's support, launched an Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) in 2016 to develop a national profile of out-of-school children in Papua New Guinea. With the main aim of reducing the number of children who are out of school around the world, the OOSCI works with more than 50 countries to ensure that children have access to quality education. Since its launch in Papua New Guinea, data have been collected and are now being analysed to develop profiles of out-of-school children that will be used to identify the barriers that are keeping the children away from school and develop sound policies to help tackle this issue of exclusion (UNICEF, n.d.).

International assistance

In 2018, a partnership between the governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia to improve learning in early grades resulted in the installation of a digital library called E-Granary, which stores up to 32 million valuable learning and teaching resources (Loop PNG, 2018). This initiative is being trialled in six rural schools in three provinces (Australia High Commission Papua New Guinea, n.d.). This resource is expected to be used by teachers and students to support teaching and learning across all subjects in the curriculum. Also in 2018, the Australian government provided ICT resources to teachers and students of Sogeri National High School, including 40 computers with software installed, wireless Internet access, a server and storage to improve learning in schools across Papua New Guinea.

Concluding Remarks

Access, retention and the provision of quality education are at the heart of the challenges facing Papua New Guinea's education system. They must be addressed if everyone in Papua New Guinea is to have access to basic education.

To encourage universal education in Papua New Guinea, a number of policies have been implemented over the past decade. These include provincial education plans, School Learning Improvement Plans, Student Behaviour Management Policy, Literacy Policy, Gender Equity in Education Policy, Special Education Policy, Language Policy and TVET Strategic Plan (Department of Education Papua New Guinea, 2020b). These policies were created to increase access and retention rates and ensure that quality education was provided to all children. One of the most notable policies implemented by the government was the abolition of school fees for basic education under the TFF Education Policy.

However, implementing enabling policies and educational reforms is not enough to achieve progress in meeting education-related targets. They need to be complemented by the provision of resources and infrastructure that facilitate the effective delivery of basic education services.

The issue of school dropouts, poor retention, low progress and transition rates in schools, a lack of delivery of essential education services particularly in the rural areas and an increase in the school population warrants an innovative solution such as the proliferation of ICT usage in the education system.

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CHAPTER

6

Samoa:
Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific

Executive Summary

Despite a marked improvement in enrolment at all levels of education over the past decade in Samoa, there are still large proportions of students who do not continue from Year 12 to Year 13. The net intake rate for primary education in 2019 was low, 45 per cent. That same year, girls' enrolment was higher than boys' and more girls than boys transitioned from primary to secondary education. The repetition rate for learners in primary school has become a concern, especially for boys. The shortage of teachers at the primary level, under-qualification of primary teachers and under-resourced primary schools contribute to school dropout rates.

The education data also reveal that major disparities exist between children with disabilities and children without disabilities. They show that children with disabilities are more likely to drop out before completing their education. Further, insufficient tailored resources and facilities for children with disabilities, especially at secondary levels and in rural areas, force these children out of school.

Access and equity need to be expanded to include those who leave school prematurely and those with special needs. There is a need to improve gross enrolment rates and net enrolment rates at primary and secondary levels, transition rates at secondary levels and repetition rates through effective initiatives.

Country Profile: Geography and Demographics

Samoa lies in the larger sub-region of the Pacific Ocean called Polynesia, halfway between New Zealand and Hawaii (see Figure 20). The country is made up of two main islands, Upolu and Savai'i, which make up almost 99 per cent of the land

mass. In addition, there are eight smaller, uninhabited islands (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Upolu is where almost 75 per cent of the population live; the remainder live on Savai'i. The capital of the country, Apia, is located on Upolu. The country is vulnerable to natural disasters such as cyclones, flooding and earthquakes, all of which climate change is exacerbating. The official languages of the country are English and Samoan, and an estimated 91 per cent of the population use Samoan as their main means of communication at home (UNICEF, 2017).

The 2016 census put the population of Samoa at 195,979, which meant it had increased by 8,159 in the past five years (a rise of 4.3 per cent), resulting in an annual growth rate of 0.9 per cent. Almost 78 per cent of the population lived on Upolu Island in 2016. Nearly 38 per cent of the population was below the age of 15, and 32 per cent in the 30–54 age group. A small proportion of the population (5 per cent) is above the age of 65; 52 per cent of the total population are male. There was a negative growth rate of 0.3 per cent for 2017. The gross domestic product (GDP) for 2018 at current market prices stood at 2.2 billion Tala and 2 billion Tala in constant prices. GDP growth in 2018 was 0.7 per cent in constant values (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Overview of the Education Sector in Samoa

The education sector in Samoa is made up of early childhood education (ECE), government and non-government primary and secondary schools, and post-school education and training (PSET) that is largely provided by the National University of Samoa. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC) manages

Figure 20: Map of Samoa

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the ECE and schools, and the Samoa Qualifications Authority oversees the operations of PSET. The official age for ECE is 3–4 and enrolment in early education is optional at 2.5–4 years (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2016). Primary education is compulsory from Levels 1 to 8; secondary education is also compulsory and runs from Levels 9 to 13. The students sit the Samoa School Certificate (SSC) national examination in Year 12, which determines their progression to Year 13 (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2016). There were a total of 212 schools in Samoa in 2019. Of those, 167 were government schools (79 per cent), 36 mission schools (17 per cent) and 9 private schools (4 per cent) (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2019b). Public expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure in 2016 was 4.1 per cent (World Bank, 2020).

Early childhood education in Samoa

It is compulsory for every child in Samoa to attend school until they reach tertiary level. Early childhood education (ECE) is now compulsory via the *Education Amendment Act 2019*, which requires all children from age 4 to attend ECE. ECE is considered a fundamental first step in every child's educational life. The National Council of Early Childhood Education, with the assistance of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, oversees the ECE operations in Samoa while the ECE centres are managed by boards of various Churches or religious groups and organisations.

ECE is provided by NGOs in Samoa; some centres are run by school boards of local communities, others by pastors' wives and others are privately owned. There were a total of 125 ECE centres recorded in the country in 2019, with a total enrolment of 4,203 — 2,082 were girls and 2,121 were boys aged between 2 and 6 years (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2019b).

Primary education

Primary education in Samoa ranges from Years 1 to 8, and it is compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 14 to attend school under the *Education Act 2009* and in line with Samoa's commitment to achieving Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2, universal completion of primary education.

Secondary education

At the end of Year 8, students sit the Year 8 National Examination to determine their entry into secondary schools. The students sit two major examinations in secondary schools, the National School Certificate examination in Year 12, which determines their entry to Year 13, and the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate (PSSC) examination, now called the Samoa Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC), at the end of Year 13, which determines their entry to tertiary education (Lealaolesau, 2012; Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2016).

Post-school education and training

After graduating from high school, students have a number of options including tertiary education, pre- and in-service professional education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), training in theological and religious instruction, apprenticeship programmes, non-formal education and on-the-job training. Tertiary education is offered by the National University of Samoa, the University of the South Pacific (USP) Alafua Campus and the Australia Pacific Technical College (APTC). The Oceania University of Medicine, based at the Samoa Ministry of Health, offers programmes through online modes of instruction.

TVET pathways in schools

MESC continues to prioritise the importance of TVET pathways for secondary schools across Samoa. TVET is offered in secondary schools in the form of practical subjects such as agriculture, food and textiles technology, arts and crafts and design technology. There are also a number of non-government institutions such as Don Bosco Technical Centre, Laumua o Punaoa Technical Centre, Uesiliana College and the Leulumoega School of Fine Art (Government of Samoa, Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2015).

Table 35: School Attendance in Samoa, 2016

Total (age 5–17)			Age 5–12			Age 13–17		
Total	At School	Not at School	Total	At School	Not at School	Total	At School	Not at School
58,447	54,037	4,410	38,412	36,272	2,140	20,035	17,765	2,270

Adapted from: Samoa Bureau of Statistics (2017)

The data in the table above indicate that at the time of the 2016 census, a total of 4,410 children and youth of ECE, primary and secondary age were not in school. This points to a worrying trend in attendance rates.

Key Education Statistics

School enrolment

Table 36 (below) shows school enrolment by each level for 2018 and 2019. Primary education enrolment increased in 2019 compared to 2018. Enrolment for all year levels, except Year 2, increased in 2019. In total there was an increase of approximately 2 per cent in primary enrolment figures from 2018. At the secondary level, there was an increase in the overall number of students enrolled from 16,000 in 2018 to 16,365 in 2019, thus the participation rate is increasing.

Table 36: School Enrolment in Samoa 2018, 2019

School Level	Year Level	2018	2019
Primary	Y1	6,122	6,282
	Y2	5,912	5,882
	Y3	5,435	5,795
	Y4	5,397	5,410
	Y5	5,242	5,261
	Y6	5,015	5,211
	Y7	4,874	5,018
	Y8	4,709	4,687
Total		42,706	43,546
Secondary	Y9	4,107	4,334
	Y10	3,784	3,897
	Y11	3,080	3,002
	Y12	2,967	2,889
	Y13	2,062	2,243
Total		16,000	16,365

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (2019a)

School attendance for people with disabilities

The attendance data in Table 37 (below) show that 20 per cent of children with disabilities in the age group of 5–7 years had never attended school compared to 2.5 per cent for children without disabilities in the same age group. This shows that a high proportion of students with disabilities are not participating in education at all.

Table 37: School Attendance and Disability Status in Samoa

School Attendance	With Disabilities		Without Disabilities	
	Number	%	Number	%
Ever Attended School				
Total	641	100	80,653	100
Attended School	512	79.9	78,667	97.5
Never Attended	129	20.1	1,986	2.5
Currently Attending School				
Total	512	100	78,667	100
Attending School	409	79.9	59,213	75.3
Left School	103	20.1	19,454	24.7

Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics (2018)

Access and participation indicators

GROSS ENROLMENT RATE (GER) IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A total of 4,203 students enrolled in ECE in 2019. The GER remained below 30 per cent between 2015 and 2019, and the GPI indicates a disparity in favour of female students.

Table 38: GER in ECE in Samoa

Year	Enrolment in ECE Education			Population of Official ECE School-Age (2.5–5 years old)			GER in ECE Education			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2015	2,093	2,090	4,183	8,451	7,749	16,200	25%	27%	26%	1.08
2016	2,014	2,023	4,037	8,297	7,652	15,949	24%	26%	25%	1.08
2017	2,365	2,471	4,836	7,951	7,402	15,353	30%	33%	31%	1.12
2018	2,457	2,654	5,111	9,059	8,292	17,350	27%	32%	29%	1.18
2019	2,121	2,082	4,203	9,226	8,443	17,669	23%	25%	24%	1.07

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (2019b)

NET ENROLMENT RATE (NER) IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The 2019 NER is lower than the GER, indicating that fewer students in the official ECE age group were attending ECE. The GPI indicates disparity in favour of female students here as well. The figures indicate that there is not a huge difference between the participation of boys and girls in ECE, but there is a slightly higher proportion of girls than boys participating in ECE.

Table 39: NER in ECE in Samoa

Year	Enrolment of Official ECE Age Group			Population of Official ECE School-Age (3–5 years old)			NER in ECE Education			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2015	1,797	1,733	3,530	8,451	7,749	16,200	21%	22%	22%	1.09
2016	1,737	1,752	3,489	8,297	7,652	15,949	21%	23%	22%	1.09
2017	2,072	2,162	4,234	7,951	7,402	15,353	26%	29%	28%	1.10
2018	2,145	2,317	4,462	9,059	8,292	17,350	24%	28%	26%	1.18
2019	1,927	1,920	3,847	9,226	8,443	17,669	21%	23%	22%	1.09

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

GROSS ENROLMENT RATE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

The GER shows the participation of students in a given level of education, and the capacity of the education system to enrol all students regardless of their age groups (Table 40).

Table 40: GER in Primary Education in Samoa

Year	Enrolment – Primary			GER (%)			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2015	21,415	19,835	41,250	108%	107%	107%	1.00
2016	21,687	20,381	42,068	106%	108%	107%	1.02
2017	22,073	20,595	42,668	106%	107%	107%	1.01
2018	22,069	20,637	42,706	107%	111%	109%	1.03
2019	22,434	21,112	43,546	108%	113%	110%	1.04

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

NET ENROLMENT RATE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

The NER shows steady movement over the past five years among official school-aged (5–12 years old) children attending primary education.

Table 41: NER in Primary Education in Samoa

Year	Official Primary Age Enrolment (5–12 years old)			NER (%)			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2015	19,830	18,635	38,465	100%	101%	100%	1.01
2016	20,194	19,087	39,281	99%	101%	100%	1.02
2017	20,713	19,436	40,149	100%	101%	101%	1.02
2018	20,702	19,428	40,130	101%	104%	102%	1.04
2019	20,888	19,767	40,655	101%	105%	103%	1.05

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

Table 42 (below) shows the total number of students with disabilities enrolled in primary schools from 2015 to 2019. The highest number of students with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools was recorded in 2019.

Table 42: Students with Disabilities in Primary Education in Samoa

Students with Disabilities Enrolled in Primary Education	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Male	95	100	90	166	95
Female	71	54	50	92	186
Total	166	154	140	258	281

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

GER IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

The GER is the total enrolment in secondary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official age (13–17 years old). The GER in this section is calculated based on population estimates provided by SPC.

The total population shows the overall number of students enrolled in secondary education regardless of their age and indicates a trend of increasing enrolment. Unlike the GER in primary education, the secondary schooling GER shows a fluctuating trend at less than 100 per cent.

The purpose of the GER is to show the participation of students in a given level of education, and the capacity of the education system to enrol students of a particular age group. Female students have been dominating enrolment in secondary education for the last five years and it is believed that girls are more academically oriented than boys, based on low male student gross enrolment. The low GER for male students suggests that boys leave secondary education early to register with either PSET or TVET providers.

The GER over the last five years has remained above 75 per cent, with the highest rate — 80 per cent — recorded in 2014. This suggests that there is consistently low participation of students in secondary education; many male students prefer to enrol with TVET and PSET providers sooner rather than later. Female students have a higher GER than male students, as recorded from 2012 to 2016, indicating that more female than male students remain in secondary education.

Table 43: GER in Secondary Education in Samoa, 2015–2019

Year	Enrolment in Secondary Education			GER (%)			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2015	7,980	8,762	16,742	71%	85%	78%	1.20
2016	7,967	8,556	16,523	71%	83%	77%	1.17
2017	7,803	8,494	16,297	69%	82%	75%	1.18
2018	7,702	8,298	16,000	75%	89%	82%	1.18
2019	7,767	8,598	16,365	70%	86%	77%	1.22

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b).

NER IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

The NER shows a fluctuating trend over the last five years, with increases of at least 4 per cent compared to 2015. GPI is consistently greater than 1, indicating that the Ministry should address the disparity.

Table 44: NER in Secondary Education in Samoa, 2015–2019

Year	Enrolment in Official Secondary Education (13–17 years old)			Net Enrolment Rate (%)			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2015	7,002	7,662	14,664	62%	75%	68%	1.20
2016	7,055	7,528	14,583	63%	73%	68%	1.16
2017	6,874	7,516	14,390	61%	72%	67%	1.19
2018	6,805	7,300	14,105	66%	78%	72%	1.18
2019	6,648	7,356	14,004	66%	80%	72%	1.21

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

Progression and completion indicators in primary education

PROGRESSION RATE (PR) AND GROSS INTAKE RATE (GIR) IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

All the year levels that show a percentage below 100 in Table 45 (below) indicate that there were students who did not progress to the next level of education.

Table 45: PR for Primary Level Education in Samoa, 2019

Year Level	New Entrants Enrolment 2019			Total Year Level Enrolment 2018			Progression Rate in Primary Education			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Year 2	2,971	2,865	5,836	3,098	2,814	5,912	94%	97%	95%	1.04
Year 3	3,017	2,746	5,763	2,814	2,621	5,435	97%	98%	97%	1.00
Year 4	2,771	2,620	5,391	2,844	2,553	5,397	98%	100%	99%	1.02
Year 5	2,750	2,499	5,249	2,662	2,580	5,242	97%	98%	97%	1.01
Year 6	2,609	2,570	5,179	2,633	2,382	5,015	98%	100%	99%	1.02
Year 7	2,576	2,421	4,997	2,434	2,440	4,874	98%	102%	100%	1.04
Year 8	2,335	2,317	4,652	2,413	2,296	4,709	96%	95%	95%	0.99

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

The GIR for female students has been higher than the GIR for male students in the last three years. A GIR of above 100 per cent indicates that there are students

older than age 12 in the Year 8 level in addition to the new entrants enrolled in the final year level of primary education.

Table 46: GIR for Final Year of Primary Education in Samoa

Year	New Entrants to Year 8 Level (all ages)			Gross Intake Rate (%)			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2015	2,388	2,206	4,594	104%	103%	103%	0.99
2016	2,380	2,164	4,544	103%	100%	102%	0.97
2017	2,381	2,352	4,733	102%	107%	104%	1.06
2018	2,413	2,296	4,709	105%	114%	109%	1.08
2019	2,335	2,317	4,652	102%	114%	108%	1.12

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, Education (2019b)

NET INTAKE RATE (NIR) FOR THE FINAL YEAR (YEAR 8) OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

The NIR has fluctuated since 2015. A higher percentage of 12-year-old female students than male students completed the final year level of primary education (Year 8) in 2019. The highest percentages of male students entering Year 8 were recorded at 47 per cent in 2017 and 49 per cent in 2018.

Table 47: NIR for Final Year of Primary Education in Samoa

Year	Number of Children Aged 12 Entering Year 8			Net Intake Rate (%)			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2015	1,013	1,056	2,069	44%	49%	47%	1.12
2016	1,007	917	1,924	44%	42%	43%	0.7
2017	1,110	1,169	2,279	47%	53%	50%	1.13
2018	1,125	1,076	2,201	49%	53%	51%	1.09
2019	977	981	1,958	43%	48%	45%	1.14

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

DROPOUT RATE (DR) IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

The dropout rate (DR) is used to measure the trend of students from a cohort leaving education before completing it, and its effect on the internal efficiency of the education system. Table 48 (below) presents dropout rates alongside the progression and repetition rates in primary education in Samoa.

Table 48: DR at Primary Level in Samoa

Year Level	Progression Rate			Repetition Rate			Dropout Rate in Primary Education			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Year 2	94%	97%	95%	4.7%	2.4%	3.6%	5.3%	2.2%	4.2%	0.42
Year 3	97%	98%	97%	0.7%	0.8%	0.8%	2.3%	1.6%	2.4%	0.70
Year 4	98%	100%	99%	0.7%	0.4%	0.6%	1.5%	-0.2%	0.6%	-0.13
Year 5	97%	98%	97%	0.5%	0.2%	0.4%	2.7%	1.8%	2.8%	0.67
Year 6	98%	100%	99%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	1.3%	-0.6%	0.4%	-0.46
Year 7	98%	102%	100%	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%	1.4%	-2.3%	-0.4%	-1.64
Year 8	96%	95%	95%	0.6%	0.3%	0.4%	3.0%	4.5%	4.3%	1.50

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

The dropout rate in primary education fluctuated across all year levels in 2019. According to the Ministry of Education, primary students drop out because of financial difficulties, transportation-related barriers, family issues and parents' lack of engagement in sending their children to school.

DROPOUT RATE (DR) IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

Although the secondary education dropout rate decreased between 2018 and 2019 by almost 5 per cent, it is still a concern as a large proportion (almost 45 per cent) of students dropped out of the education system in Year 11 and Year 13. According to the 2016 Samoa Education Statistical Digest, the high dropout rates could be caused by students choosing to stay home rather than attend school or by migration.

Table 49: DR at Secondary Level in Samoa

Year Level	Dropout Rate			
	2016	2017	2018	2019
Year 9	9.0%	8.0%	13.0%	8.1%
Year 10	7.0%	9.0%	10.0%	5.1%
Year 11	24.0%	20.0%	19.0%	20.1%
Year 12	2.0%	5.0%	4.0%	5.9%
Year 13	29.0%	29.0%	30.0%	24.6%

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

TRANSITION RATE (TR) FROM PRIMARY EDUCATION TO SECONDARY EDUCATION

The transition rate (TR) from primary to secondary measures information about the scope of the transition from primary to secondary education.

Table 50: TR from Primary to Secondary Education in Samoa

Year Level	Year 8 Enrolment			Year 9 New Entrants			Transition Rate: Primary to Secondary Education			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2015	2,400	2,213	4,613	2,185	2,013	4,198	91.0%	95.0%	92.9%	1.04
2016	2,396	2,173	4,569	2,101	2,049	4,150	87.5%	92.6%	90.0%	1.06
2017	2,393	2,358	4,751	2,100	1,993	4,093	87.8%	84.5%	86.2%	0.96
2018	2,413	2,296	4,709	1,999	2,076	4,075	82.8%	90.4%	86.5%	1.10
2019	2,358	2,329	4,687	2,129	2,170	4,299	90.3%	93.2%	91.7%	1.00

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019)

The TR from primary to secondary education has fluctuated over the last five years between 85 per cent and 95 per cent, which reflects the overall high transition of students from primary level to secondary level education.

PROGRESSION RATE (PR) IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

The progression rate (PR) in secondary education varies from year to year, with more female students than male students generally progressing through secondary school.

Table 51: PR in Secondary Education in Samoa, 2019

Year Level	New Entrant Year Level Enrolment (2019)			Total Year Level Enrolment (2018)			Progression Rate in Secondary Education			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Year 9	2,129	2,170	4,299	2,023	2,084	4,107	88%	95%	91%	1.07
Year 10	1,804	2,060	3,864	1,919	1,865	3,784	89%	99%	94%	1.11
Year 11	1,464	1,479	2,943	1,496	1,584	3,080	76%	79%	78%	1.04
Year 12	1,271	1,555	2,826	1,400	1,567	2,967	85%	98%	92%	1.16
Year 13	958	1,276	2,234	864	1,198	2,062	68%	81%	75%	1.19

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

The progression rates for Years 9, 10 and 12 are above 90 per cent, suggesting that most of the students from Years 8, 9 and 11 in the previous year progressed to the next level. Year 13 shows the lowest progression rate and indicates that 25 per cent of the students drop out of school before completing their secondary-level

education. Generally, female students have a higher PR than male students for all year levels.

REPETITION RATE (RR) IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

The repetition rate (RR) measures the number of students from a cohort who repeat a year level and measures the effect on the internal efficiency of the education system.

Table 52: RR in Secondary Education in Samoa, 2019

Year Level	Year Level Repeaters (2019)			Year Level Enrolment (2018)			Repetition Rate			GPI
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Year 9	32	3	35	2,023	2,084	4,107	1.6%	0.1%	0.9%	0.09
Year 10	25	8	33	1,919	1,865	3,784	1.3%	0.4%	0.9%	0.33
Year 11	33	26	59	1,496	1,584	3,080	2.2%	1.6%	1.9%	0.74
Year 12	45	18	63	1,400	1,567	2,967	3.2%	1.1%	2.1%	0.36
Year 13	6	3	9	864	1,198	2,062	0.7%	0.3%	0.4%	0.36
Total	141	58	199	7,702	8,298	16,000	1.8%	0.7%	1.2%	0.38

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

The data presented in the table above show that overall the proportion of male students who repeat a year level is high compared to the proportion of female students. Year 12 and Year 13 students may repeat a year if they do not achieve the pass rate required to enrol in Year 13 and tertiary education.

Education attainment for people with disabilities

Table 53 (below) gives a summary of the population aged 5 years and older disaggregated by disability status and educational attainment. According to the *Samoa Disability Monograph* (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2018), almost 51 per cent of the entire population aged over 5 years had completed secondary education as their highest form of qualification, whereas around 2 per cent of the population had never been to school, similar to people without disabilities. Conversely, 37 per cent of people with disabilities had completed secondary school and around 10 per cent had never been to school. The data also reveal that the number of people who had never attended schools was higher in rural areas, and that among people with disabilities, very few attend an educational institution designed for students with special needs.

Table 53: Educational Attainment of Students With and Without a Disability in Samoa

Background Characteristics		Total Pop (aged 5+ years)	Never Been to School (%)	Preschool (%)	Primary School (%)	Secondary School (%)	Higher Education (%)	Special Needs Education (%)	Became Missionaries (%)	Missing/Unavailable (%)
Total		167,633	1.8	1.1	31.5	51.2	14.1	0.1	0.1	0.2
With Disabilities										
Total		3,370	9.6	1.6	41.5	36.7	7.2	1.6	1.0	0.6
Sex	Male	1,621	9.9	1.5	41.6	35.4	8.1	1.9	0.9	0.7
	Female	1,749	9.4	1.7	41.3	38	6.4	1.3	1.0	0.9
Area	Rural	2,883	10.4	1.7	42.8	36.1	5.7	1.5	0.9	0.9
	Urban	487	4.9	1.4	33.7	40.3	16.4	2.3	1.0	0.0
Age Group	5–7	519	19.3	4.8	65.3	9.8	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.0
	18–49	565	17.7	0.7	18.1	44.4	10.3	8.0	0.4	0.5
	50+	2,286	5.4	1.1	41.8	40.9	8.1	0.3	1.3	1.1
Without Disabilities										
Total		164,263	1.7	1.1	31.3	51.5	14.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Sex	Male	84,562	1.9	1.1	32.8	50.8	13.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
	Female	79,701	1.5	1.1	29.7	52.2	15.3	0.1	0.1	0.1
Area	Rural	132,208	1.8	1.2	32.5	52.9	11.5	0.1	0.1	0.2
	Urban	32,055	1.3	0.7	26.4	45.8	25.6	0.1	0.1	0.0
Age Group	5–7	57,904	3.3	2.1	67.3	26.9	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
	18–49	78,370	0.6	0.5	6.8	67.9	24.0	0.1	0.0	0.2
	50+	27,989	1.5	0.7	25.5	56.3	15.4	0.0	0.3	0.3

Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics (2018)

Teachers' Qualifications in Samoa

Primary teachers' qualifications

Table 54 (below) shows that more than one quarter of mission school teachers hold a teaching certificate; the comparative rate for private schools is almost 20 per cent and for government schools only 10 per cent. Primary school teachers who have a

diploma in Education account for 44.6 per cent of the teaching staff, with mission and private schools accounting for 28 per cent. Teachers with a bachelor's degree in Education total 51.6 per cent, with 5.6 per cent holding a master's degree.

A number of programmes are provided by the Ministry of Education to help teachers upgrade their qualifications — for example, the Science Teachers Accelerated Programme, also known as STAP, is a two-year in-service programme that enables science teachers in secondary schools in the Pacific region to upgrade their qualifications (Faculty of Science, Technology and Environment, 2019). These programmes are coordinated by the Ministry in collaboration with the National University of Samoa, Australia Pacific Training College and the University of the South Pacific (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2019a).

Table 54: Qualifications of Primary Teachers in Samoa

Qualifications	Gender	Government		Mission		Private	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Teaching Certificates	Male	16	1.4	12	5.3	2	1.8
	Female	94	8.6	57	25.2	19	17.9
	Total	110	10.0	69	30.5	21	19.7
Other Certificates	Male	0	0	8	3.5	0	0
	Female	0	0	55	24.3	15	14.1
	Total	0	0	63	27.8	15	14.1
Diploma in Education	Male	102	9.3	5	2.2	4	3.7
	Female	385	35.3	35	15.4	8	7.5
	Total	487	44.6	40	17.6	12	11.3
Bachelor of Education	Male	51	4.6	4	1.7	2	1.8
	Female	205	18.8	20	8.8	18	16.9
	Total	256	23.4	24	9.5	20	18.7
Post-graduate Diploma	Male	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Female	7	0.6	1	0.4	2	1.8
	Total	8	0.6	1	0.4	2	1.8
Master's Degree	Male	1	0.1	3	1.3	0	0
	Female	2	0.1	3	1.3	3	2.8
	Total	3	0.2	6	2.6	3	2.8
Total		1,090		226		106	

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, Education (2019b)

Secondary teachers' qualifications

A total of 642 teachers currently teaching in government secondary schools in Samoa have some form of qualification; 368 teachers in mission schools have some form of qualification, as do 26 teachers in private schools. Most of the teachers have a diploma in Education across the three authorities. In the government schools in 2019, 23.4 per cent of teachers had a bachelor of Education, compared with 9.4 per cent of the teachers in mission schools and 3.8 per cent in private schools.

Table 55: Qualifications of Secondary Teachers in Samoa

Qualifications	Gender	Government		Mission		Private	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Teaching Certificates	Male	2	0.3	31	8.4	0	0
	Female	4	0.6	39	10.5	0	0
	Total	6	0.9	70	18.9	0	0
Other Certificates	Male	0	0	32	8.6	0	0
	Female	0	0	38	10.3	0	0
	Total	0	0	70	18.9	0	0
Diploma in Education	Male	90	14	28	7.6	11	42.3
	Female	138	21.6	46	12.5	2	7.6
	Total	231	36.1	74	20.1	13	49.9
Bachelor of Education	Male	51	7.9	15	4.0	0	0
	Female	102	15.9	20	5.4	1	3.8
	Total	153	23.9	35	9.4	1	3.8
Post-graduate Diploma	Male	7	1.1	2	0.5	0	0
	Female	13	2.0	8	2.1	2	7.6
	Total	20	3.1	10	2.6	2	7.6
Master's Degree	Male	1	0.1	4	0.1	0	0
	Female	1	0.1	8	2.1	0	0
	Total	2	0.2	12	3.1	0	0
Total		642		368		26	

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education (2019b)

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Infrastructure in Samoa

The following table provides an overview of the ICT infrastructure in Samoa in 2017 and 2019 according to selected indicators.

Table 56: Selected Indicators for ICTs in Samoa

Secure Internet Servers: Samoa	93 (2019)
Fixed Broadband Subscriptions (per 100 people)	0.87 (2017)
Individuals Using the Internet (% of population)	34% (2017)
Mobile Cellular Subscriptions (per 100 people)	64% (2017)

Source: World Bank (2020)

A submarine cable and satellite service provides international Internet connectivity in Samoa. The country is connected to the American Samoa–Hawaii (ASH) cable system via the Samoa–American Samoa cable. The current system capacity of 1 gigabit per second (Gbps) was above Samoa's bandwidth demand of 420 megabits per second (Mbps) in 2015, but will be significantly below the projected bandwidth demand of 6 Gbps in 2022 and 30 Gbps by 2028 (Asian Development Bank, n.d.).

The proposed submarine cable, with a minimum capacity of 1 terabit per second and a regulated bandwidth price below current price levels, can facilitate broader Internet access and meet Samoa's growing demand for online access and services. A number of retail Internet service providers offer mobile, fixed-line and Internet services in the country (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2016).

Access and pricing

Wholesale Internet prices are high in Samoa, almost USD1, 500 MBS/month (World Bank, 2015). The cost of telecommunication services is also high because of high retail Internet prices caused by high wholesale Internet bandwidth costs. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture's *Education Statistical Digest* (2016) reports that towards the end of 2014, almost 95 per cent of the population of Samoa had access to a mobile network, while mobile penetration had reached 89 per cent and mobile broadband access was estimated to be 27 per cent.

Information and communications technology (ICT) in education

The Ministry of Education (MOE) supports the idea of integrating ICTs in education to address the shortage of teachers and other resources in key subject areas and using ICTs to promote the growing interest in education in regions where there are low levels of literacy and numeracy. However, development in this area is challenged by connectivity issues. The MOE is hopeful that the Samoa School-Net and Community Access Project — funded by the Asian Development Bank — will solve this issue (Asian Development Bank, 2010). The aim of the project was

to improve the quality of education with the help of ICTs. Under this programme, the Ministry of Education provided 38 private and government rural secondary schools and colleges in Savai'i and Upolu with computers and e-resources, a printer, a scanner, a data projector and furniture to be used in a Learning Centre managed by each school (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2016).

The MOE, with the help of the ICTs and Media Division, ensures that ICT tools and resources are available and used to improve teaching and learning. It has distributed 1,500 tablets to 75 primary schools and 35 Raspberry Pi devices to 75 primary schools in order to improve literacy and numeracy in schools (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2019a). A total of 140 teachers were trained to use the tablets and encouraged to integrate e-resources into their teaching. Further, the teachers were also trained in using the Aptus device and resources in order to improve literacy and reading levels.

From 2005, 12 community learning centres called Feso'ota'I were established in the remote areas of Upolu and Savai'i to provide local residents with access to computers and the Internet (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020). Significant barriers have impeded the national roll-out of these projects: connectivity issues, especially in the rural areas, underuse of resources and lack of long-term funding. Other projects that have been rolled out since 2008 are eLearning programmes and the distribution of laptops and introduction of computer labs for schools (Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, 2015).

The Ministry supports access and connectivity in schools and helps with the maintenance of the infrastructure and hardware replacement to ensure an efficient service is provided to all the primary and secondary schools in the country. A total of 87 primary schools (60.4 per cent) have a good working connectivity to PrimaryNet and 15 secondary colleges (42.5 per cent) have working connectivity to PrimaryNet and/or SchoolNet.

Challenges in Education

The Ministry is committed to improving the quality of education and training, and this is also reflected in their Education Sector Plans. However, development is hindered by several challenges in the education sector that affect the achievement of high-quality education and training in Samoa — for example, the quality of ECE, school dropout rates, teacher shortages, inadequately trained teachers, falling literacy and numeracy rates, and a scarcity of teaching resources and teacher training opportunities. The enrolment rates for primary education have remained constant over the years, and net enrolment rates have improved. However, the low and declining survival rates are still a concern. They are mainly because of a lack of parental support and education being seen as a low priority. The government is committed to improving access to education, and the 2009 *Education Act* allows for fines to be levied on parents if their children are not in school. Since 2010, the School Fee Grant Scheme has covered full payment of fees for primary education to reduce the financial burden on parents in educating their children.

ECE

One challenge to access to quality ECE is the large number of untrained teachers who are managed by NGOs, which raises serious concerns about the quality of basic education. Some children do not acquire the basic literacy and numeracy skills that would enable them to successfully progress through the school system.

School dropout rates

Access to and quality of education are major challenges in the primary education sector in Samoa as many students drop out before completing primary school and there is a low retention rate at the secondary level. One reason children are out of school or enrol and then drop out is the economic hardships faced by families in sending their children to school. The affordability of schooling at the secondary level is a huge challenge for parents. Limited access to appropriate Maths and Science courses at the secondary level, and a shortage of teachers in specialist subjects, particularly Maths and Science, also contribute to the problem of OOSC.

Reaching the OOSC with disabilities

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture *Education for All 2015 National Review* report highlights that there are a number of children at the primary level who are hard to reach; these are the vulnerable and the disadvantaged who live in poor and remote locations and are not being enrolled despite the legislation and incentives that have been employed to increase access to education (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2015). Adding to this is the challenge faced by mainstream teachers in providing inclusive education to children with disabilities who are mainstreamed into primary and secondary schools. Children and adults with disabilities face many barriers to full participation in education, are often the poorest and most marginalised members of society and are most at risk of being left behind. According to the 2018 *Samoa Disability Monograph* (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2018), based on an analysis of the 2016 population and housing census, there are significant disparities between people with disabilities and people without disabilities. People with disabilities were found to be five times more likely to have never attended school compared to people without disabilities.

About 10 per cent of people with disabilities had no education compared to only 2 per cent of people without disabilities, and those who attended school were only able to complete their primary education. A decline in attendance rates at the secondary level is due to factors present both at home and in schools. For instance, the curriculum in schools is not meeting the diverse needs of the children with disabilities, teachers lack the pedagogical knowledge and skills required to support learning for students with disabilities and parents may place more emphasis on educating children without disabilities than children with disabilities.

Teachers

Adding to the above challenges is the inadequate supply of teachers and inadequate qualification levels among teachers. Teachers at the primary school level are not adequately trained (at pre-service and in-service levels) and there is a lack of ongoing support in terms of professional development to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary content, pedagogical and assessment knowledge to deliver effective literacy and numeracy programmes. Another concern is teachers' lack of knowledge about how to identify and teach children with special needs. Teacher attrition is high at both the primary and secondary levels, with teachers leaving the profession as other opportunities arise (Government of Samoa, 2013).

Initiatives to Increase Access to and Success in Education

The Samoa School Fees Grant Scheme (SSFGS)

The Samoa School Fees Grant Scheme (SSFGS) for primary school was introduced in 2010, with technical and financial assistance from the governments of Australia and New Zealand, to reduce the financial burden of schooling on parents. With the help of this scheme, schools were able to increase their learning and teaching materials and there was an increase in the enrolment numbers across different year levels as reported in the *Education for All 2015 Review* (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2015). In 2013, this scheme was extended to secondary schools with the assistance of the Government of New Zealand. The SSFGS benefits students in 142 government schools, 15 mission schools and 3 special needs schools and has contributed to keeping more students in schools and the dropout numbers low (UNESCO, 2015).

The Samoa Inclusive Education Demonstration Programme (SIEDP) was implemented between 2009 and 2014 with the aim of reaching children with disabilities who were not in education. The programme focussed on facilitating access to mainstream schools for children with a disability and ensuring that institutions are equipped to meet the children's needs to retain them and provide quality education (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2015).

Inclusive education at all levels

Including children with disabilities in mainstream education is one of the priority targets for the Ministry of Education in Samoa. The Inclusive Education (IE) Policy for Students Living with Disability 2015 provides a basis to improve educational opportunities for children living with disabilities in early childhood, school and post-school education. The Ministry provides ongoing in-service training to teachers to improve their knowledge in understanding and identifying students with disabilities and help them deal with the challenges of supporting students with a variety of needs and strengths.

In 2019, a national training programme was conducted by the Ministry in which 293 teachers (from Years 4, 5 and 6) were trained in inclusive education practices and strategies for teaching students with disabilities. Teachers from other levels will be trained at the next national training event. That same year, a total of 281 students with disabilities were enrolled in primary schools throughout the country. The Ministry provides training and curriculum resources support to ECE teachers. To help with ECE curriculum delivery, a total of 20 ECE supplementary resources were provided to ECE centres.

Concluding Remarks

To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system in Samoa, specific investments need to be made in improving school resources, teacher training education and ongoing professional development. This can be achieved through improving sectoral planning, improving educational facilities and developing local and relevant teaching resources at all levels of education. To improve the quality of education, the Ministry needs to explore ways to upskill teachers, particularly in Mathematics and Science. One way to achieve gender parity and equality in education and increase enrolment for boys and girls is to create diverse pathways from schools to and within post-school education and training.

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CHAPTER

7

Solomon Islands:
Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific

Executive Summary

While the government in the Solomon Islands has done much in the past decade to address issues related to limited access to and quality of education, much has still to be done to address the shortfalls in the education system that prevent large numbers of out-of-school-children and youth with inadequate skills from being productive members of both the workforce and society.

Enrolment for primary education has increased over the past decade. However, there are variations in enrolment rates between the different provinces in the Solomon Islands, ranging from 79.5 per cent in the Western Province to 98.6 per cent in Honiara (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2019b). Only half of the students who complete primary education are able to access secondary education due to limited places, and around half of the students who attend secondary schools either fail their exams or drop out because they are unable to pay the school fees. Moreover, gender disparities become more prominent in the higher grades, with more boys than girls completing their education (Noble et al., 2011).

Girls exiting the education system at the junior secondary level is a concern that needs to be addressed by using more coordinated and evidence-based policy approaches. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development should strive to increase student retention at the secondary level and to improve the quality of learning in primary and secondary education overall. There is a need to develop action plans to reduce teacher absenteeism, increase teacher competency and reduce student dropout rates. There is also a need to expand the open schools pilot initiatives to give more students a second-chance equivalent education. Given the geographic challenges, increasing access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) may be essential for delivering skills through distance delivery methods.

Country Profile: Geography and Demographics

The Solomon Islands is an archipelago of 922 islands located in the Southwest Pacific (see Figure 21). It consists of six major islands — Choiseul, New Georgia, Isabel, Guadalcanal, Malaita and Makira — and hundreds of small islands, of which approximately 300 are inhabited. Almost 80 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. According to a 2017 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, the total population of the Solomon Islands was close to 0.6 million, most of whom live on the country's two main islands, Guadalcanal and Malaita. There is tremendous cultural diversity in the Solomon Islands, as the inhabitants speak more than 70 languages (UNDP, 2021).

The Solomon Islands has the Pacific's highest population growth rate, over 2 per cent per annum, which is caused by a high fertility rate of 4.7 per cent. Almost 51 per cent of the total population in the Solomon Islands is aged 19 or under, which means that half the population is of school age. The net enrolment ratios (NER) across the four sectors of education indicate that there is overage enrolment at primary level, and the number of students continuing their education decreases considerably as they grow older. These overall statistics have implications for the education sector, as it may mean an increase in demand for schools and services related to education (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2019a).

High unemployment and lack of income-generating opportunities make the youth vulnerable to crime and violence. The UNDP's 2018 *Human Development Report* ranks the Solomon Islands 152th, putting the country in the low human development category. Since 1990, the Solomon Islands' life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling have all increased, as has the country's gross national income per capita, which increased by about 16.0 per cent to USD1,872 in 2017. However, the Solomon Islands faces many development challenges (UNDP, 2018).

Figure 21: Map of the Solomon Islands

Source: Mapsland (2021). (Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Licence)

Overview of the Education Sector in the Solomon Islands

The formal education system in the Solomon Islands consists of two years of early childhood education (ECE), seven years of primary education, three years of junior secondary and four years of senior secondary education. Basic education in the Solomon Islands consists of Years 1 to 9. Education in the country is provided by primary schools, community high schools, provincial secondary schools and national secondary schools, administered by numerous government and non-government education authorities (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2008).

After successfully completing senior secondary education, students are eligible to undertake tertiary education provided by the Solomon Islands National University (SINU), the University of the South Pacific Solomon Islands Centre (USP SI Centre) and other regional universities. The USP SI Centre offers distance learning courses for high school students who have failed the qualifying examinations conducted by the government through the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. Rural Training Centres (RTC) provide technical skills training to students who leave school after completing a basic education.

Key Education Statistics

Access to and participation in education

STUDENT ENROLMENT

According to the Solomon Islands Education Management Information Systems (SIEMIS), as reported in MEHRD's *Annual Report 2018* (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2018a), there were a total of 502 ECE centres, 516 primary schools, 243 community high schools, 16 provincial high schools, 10 national secondary schools and 47 Rural Training Centres operating in the country in 2018.

Table 57: Student Enrolment by Sector in the Solomon Islands

	ECCE	Primary	Secondary
Female	15,014	64,470	25,733
Male	15,326	69,134	69,134

Source: SIEMIS, 2019, adapted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2018a)

Table 58: Net Enrolment in Schooling in the Solomon Islands

Education Level	2016			2017		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
ECE	39%	38%	38%	42%	40%	41%
Primary	91%	92%	91%	92%	93%	92%
Junior Secondary	42%	38%	40%	41%	36%	38%
Senior Secondary	29%	29%	29%	30%	29%	30%
Total	50%	49%	50%	51%	49%	50%

Source: Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2019a)

GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER) BY LEVEL, GENDER AND DISABILITY

A high gross enrolment rate (GER) generally indicates a high degree of participation, whether the students belong to the official age group or not. A GER value approaching 100 per cent indicates that all the school-age population can be accommodated but does not indicate the proportion already enrolled. According to the information presented Table 59, the highest GER was recorded in primary education, while secondary education had the lowest in 2017 and 2018. A high GER of 117.9 per cent in primary education could be a result of students repeating a year (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2018b).

Table 59: GER by School Level and Gender in the Solomon Islands

	2017			2018		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
ECE	96.1%	91.7%	93.8%	95.2%	89.9%	92.5%
Primary	117.4%	118.9%	118.2%	117.4%	118.3%	117.9%
JSS	75.4%	70.9%	73.1%	73.7%	73.3%	73.5%
SSS	34.9%	35.7%	35.3%	34.1%	35.7%	34.9%
Total	80.9%	79.3%	80.1%	80.1%	79.3%	79.7%

Source: SIEMIS, extracted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2018b)

NET ENROLMENT RATES (NER) BY LEVEL AND GENDER

The net enrolment rate (NER) is defined as enrolment of the official age group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021c). In the Solomon Islands, those ages are 3–4 for ECCE, 5–11 for primary, 12–14 for junior secondary and 15–18 for senior secondary, including Year 13, which is the foundation year at the senior secondary level. A high NER denotes a high degree of coverage for the official school-aged

population. There has been limited improvement in NER at any level of education except among the age 5 group in pre-primary education in recent years. In fact, the NER for all levels has declined over the past two-year period.

Table 60: NER in the Solomon Islands

	2017			2018		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
ECE	41.9%	39.7%	40.7%	41.2%	37.8%	39.4%
Primary	91.9%	92.7%	92.3%	91.8%	91.7%	91.8%
JSS	41.0%	35.7%	38.3%	39.1%	35.4%	37.2%
SSS	30.3%	28.9%	29.6%	29.3%	28.6%	28.9%
Total	51.2%	49.3%	50.2%	50.4%	48.4%	49.4%

Source: SIEMIS, extracted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2018b)

Out-of-school rate (primary, junior secondary, senior secondary)

Children and young people in the official age range for the given level of education who are not enrolled in primary, secondary or higher levels of education are considered to be out of school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021b). The out-of-school indicator is used to identify the size of the population in the official age range for the given level of education who are not enrolled in school so that they can be better targeted and appropriate policies put in place to ensure they have access to education. According to the data presented in Table 61, the out-of-school rate for primary education increased by almost 2 percentage points between 2017 and 2018.

Table 61: Out-of-School Rate at Primary Level in the Solomon Islands

	2017			2018		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Total	0.6%	13.1%	6.6%	2.1%	14.2%	8.0%

Source: SIEMIS, extracted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2018b)

Gender parity

The data in Table 61 (above) show that more male students than female were enrolled at all levels of education in 2018, indicating a slight disparity in favour of male students. Table 62 shows the gender parity index (GPI) for 2017 and 2018.

Table 62: GPI by Subsector in the Solomon Islands

Sector	2017	2018
ECE	0.97	0.98
Primary	0.93	0.93
Secondary	1.00	0.97

Source: SIEMIS, extracted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2018b)

GROSS INTAKE RATIO (GIR) IN PRIMARY BY LEVEL AND GENDER

The gross intake ratio (GIR) or gross enrolment ratio is the number of students enrolled in a given level of education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021a). A high GIR indicates a high degree of access to primary education. The calculation includes all entrants to Grade 1, regardless of age. The ratio can therefore exceed 100 per cent due to overage and underage children entering school for the first time. The data in Table 63 (below), disaggregated by sex, indicate that many students are starting school older than the official entry age of 6.

Table 63: GIR by Sex at Primary Level in the Solomon Islands

	2017			2018		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Total	146.1%	144.0%	144.0%	150.8%	149.1%	149.9%

Source: SIEMIS, extracted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2018b)

NET INTAKE RATE (NIR) IN PRIMARY LEVEL BY GENDER

A high net intake rate (NIR) indicates a high degree of access to primary education for the official primary school entrance-age children. The overall percentage for 2018 is low, 29.4 per cent, which is a concern given that it indicates that less than 30 per cent of children of primary school-age were enrolled in education for the given years.

Table 64: NIR by Sex at Primary Level in the Solomon Islands

	2017			2018		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Total	29.8%	26.3%	28.0%	30.2%	28.6%	29.4%

Source: SIEMIS, extracted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2018b)

DROPOUT RATE BY LEVEL AND GENDER

The dropout rate is the proportion of students from a cohort enrolled in a given grade in a given school year who are no longer enrolled in the following school year by level, gender and province (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2018a). This indicator measures the number of pupils from a cohort leaving school without completing their education, and its effect on the internal efficiency of the education system. It is also a key indicator for analysing and projecting student flows from grade to grade within the educational cycle. According to data presented in Table 65 (below), dropout rates appear to be the highest in Years 11 and 12 for both the given years. A significant dropout rate (87 per cent) can be seen for Year 12 in 2019, with more female students (88.2 per cent) dropping out than male students (86 per cent).

Table 65: Dropout Rates by Year Level in the Solomon Islands

Year Level	2017			2018			2019		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Prep	13.1%	13.0%	13.0%	14.7%	15.5%	15.1%	15.2%	16.9%	10%
Year 1	10.4%	5.8%	8.0%	7.0%	6.9%	6.9%	10.6%	13.6%	12%
Year 2	0.3%	3.6%	2.1%	3.3%	6.9%	5.0%	6.6%	8.6%	7.6%
Year 3	7.1%	8.2%	7.7%	6.2%	2.8%	4.6%	7.1%	9.1%	8.1%
Year 4	6.4%	8.0%	7.2%	10.7%	8.7%	9.7%	10.7%	9.4%	10.1%
Year 5	11.3%	13.4%	12.4%	11.8%	9.1%	10.5%	11.0%	12.7%	11.8%
Year 6	10.8%	13.3%	12.1%	10.3%	12.3%	11.3%	8.9%	8.2%	8.6%
Year 7	5.0%	5.6%	5.3%	10.5%	7.7%	9.2%	11.5%	10.0%	10.7%
Year 8	17.5%	12.2%	14.9%	3.3%	5.9%	4.6%	13.1%	12.4%	12.8%
Year 9	24.5%	22.8%	23.7%	23.4%	23.6%	23.5%	23.5%	22.8%	23.2%
Year 10	15.7%	13.4%	14.6%	14.7%	17.6%	16.1%	13.1%	17.2%	15.1%
Year 11	42.0%	39.3%	40.6%	37.6%	40.2%	38.9%	37.6%	40.6%	39.0%
Year 12	84.3%	77.3%	80.6%	78.1%	82.3%	80.1%	86.0%	88.2%	87.0%

Source: SIEMIS, extracted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2018b)

Students with disabilities attending school

The data presented in Table 66 (below) are based simply on teachers' observational assessments of students with disabilities in the classroom. In 2017, it was reported that 2,755 students in primary and secondary levels (1.3 per cent) were identified as having a disability. This is a decrease of 21.3 per cent (754) compared to 2016. The largest category of disability recorded for the reported years was Learning Disability, followed by Hearing Impairment.

At present only the Red Cross Handicap Centre in Honiara provides education for learners of primary school-age with special needs. The Centre accommodates students with physical disabilities with financial assistance from the government (Fangalasuu & Bateman, 2015).

Table 66: Students with Disabilities by School Type in the Solomon Islands

	2016					2017				
	PS	CHS	PSS	NSS	Total	PS	CHS	PSS	NSS	Total
Gripping Impairment	51	34	0	2	87	39	41	2	0	82
Hearing Impairment	432	380	44	22	878	378	390	38	18	824
Learning Disability	544	477	35	0	1,056	509	405	21	7	942
Mental Disability	65	54	0	0	119	70	48	0	0	118
Moving Impairment	60	53	5	3	121	67	62	3	1	133
Multiple Disabilities	39	43	0	0	82	31	19	0	4	54
Other Disability	47	510	0	0	557	22	57	1	0	80
Sight Impairment	140	183	5	34	362	165	146	3	14	328
Speech Impairment	166	66	2	13	247	118	72	3	1	194
Total	1,544	1,800	91	74	3,509	1,399	1,240	71	45	2,755

Source: Extracted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2017)

Teachers' Qualifications in the Solomon Islands

Table 67 (below) gives an overview of the qualifications of teachers in the Solomon Islands in 2018. In 2018, there were 8,927 teachers — an increase of 1,666 teachers from 2017 — in early childhood, primary and secondary schools, out of which 51 per cent were female. Sixty-eight per cent of the teachers had specific education qualifications and 4 per cent were qualified in an area related to teaching (e.g., psychology or counselling). In addition, 28 per cent of the teachers had no certification or qualification (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2018a).

Table 67: Teachers' Qualifications in the Solomon Islands

Category	No. of teachers	% of total
Certified	6,032	68%
Qualified Only	6,032	4%
Neither	2,571	28%

Source: Teacher Classification 2018 (SIEMIS, 2018), extracted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2018a)

Connectivity and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Infrastructure in the Solomon Islands

Connectivity and ICT infrastructure in the Solomon Islands are provided by the three telecommunication and Internet service providers — Solomon Telekom, bmobile and SATSOL —and the Solomon Islands Government through its ICT Support Unit (ICTSU) in the Ministry of Finance and Treasury (MoFT). Mobile penetration, according to the data presented in the table below, was almost 73 per cent in 2016. Internet access is still unaffordable for most Solomon Islanders because of the country's dependence on limited satellite connectivity.

Table 68: Selected Indicators for ICT in the Solomon Islands

% of Fixed Telephone Subscriptions	1.27
% of Mobile Cellular Telephone Subscriptions	72.66
% of Households with Computer (ITU estimate)	6.70
% of Individuals Using the Internet (ITU estimate)	12 (2017)
% of Fixed (Wired) Broadband Subscriptions	0.24
Fixed Broadband Subscriptions	1,488 (2018)
% of Active Mobile Broadband Subscriptions (ITU estimate)	11.41
Secure Internet servers	38 (2019)

Source: International Telecommunication Union (2016)

A lack of connectivity to schools, lack of ICT resources in schools and lack of technical capacity has resulted in the slow uptake of the use of ICT in education in the Solomon Islands. Additionally, the *Performance Assessment Report 2015 & 2016* published by the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education Human Resource Development (2017) indicates that less than 6 per cent of primary schools and 25 per cent of community high schools have computers, printers or video players/recorders, while almost all provincial and national secondary schools have these.

Inadequate access to a power supply affects connectivity. For example, out of 251 secondary schools, only 23 per cent are connected to the main power supply according to the *ICTs in Education Master Plan 2019–2023* (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2019a). ICT projects such as One Laptop per Child (OLPC) and ICTs for Better Education (ICT4BE) in the past years have enabled the use of ICTs for teaching and learning in schools.

Table 69: ICT in Schools in the Solomon Islands

Resource Type		Primary School	Community High School	Provincial Secondary School	National Secondary School	Rural Training Centre
Communications	Fax	2	4	2	2	—
	Radio Telephone	18	6		2	
	Telephone	88	74	14	12	17
	Radio		6		2	32
	Internet and email	8	42	6	80	6
ICT Equipment	Photocopier	78	172	34	16	14
	Computer Printer	160	342	63	34	40
	Computer	206	768	94	132	122
	Video Monitor	10	20	8	8	2
	Television	4	18	4	—	4

Source: SIEMIS, extracted from Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2018b)

Challenges in Education

According to the *National Education Action Plan, 2016–2020* (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2016), factors affecting the lack of enrolment in secondary education are lack of capacity in senior secondary schools to accommodate all students progressing from junior secondary who sit senior secondary examinations, school fees for secondary education and the distances students are required to travel to attend secondary schools. In order to increase the capacity of schools to absorb students at all levels of basic education and up to senior secondary education, the government has removed the Year 6 secondary entrance examination and introduced Years 7, 8 and 9 in identified primary schools.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, under the Education Strategic Framework (ESF) 2007–2015, has made a number of strides in boosting education in the Solomon Islands — for example, a training improvement of 56 per cent in primary teachers and 62 per cent in secondary teachers. There was also an increase of 24 per cent in primary school enrolment rates and a 70 per cent increase in enrolment rates for junior secondary schools. Despite these improvements, many other facets of education in the Solomon Islands still need attention.

Out-of-school children: Primary education

The key issues in the national education system as reported in the *ICT in Education Master Plan 2019–2023,* based on policy document analysis, school visits and interviews with the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development as part of the UNESCO *Scoping Mission Report*, are "quality of education and low learning

outcomes, lack of qualified teachers and absence of professional development, shortage of ICT resources and textbooks and the need for monitoring and evaluation" (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2019a, p. 5).

Another issue facing the education system in the Solomon Islands is that a substantial number of students are not in primary schools. For instance, in 2014, around 18 per cent of school-age boys and 21 per cent of school-age girls were not enrolled in primary school. Furthermore, in 2016, the lowest promotion rates to date were recorded for Grades 9 to 12, where Grades 9 and 11 had dropout rates that exceeded 20 per cent and Year 12 more than 76 per cent (Tennyson, 2017). The NER for primary schools was 92 per cent in 2016, which is imbalanced compared to the NER for junior secondary, 40 per cent in the same year. This shows that only 40 per cent of children of the official age are enrolled in junior secondary school. The lowest NER was recorded for senior secondary education. Disturbingly, the survival rate to the last year level of secondary education (Year 13) was only 7 per cent, which shows that very few students are completing their secondary education in the Solomon Islands. Inadequate space in secondary schools and the high cost of education have been reported as factors that force students to drop out of schools (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2018a).

Lack of facilities for girls in schools

Girls in the Solomon Islands face several barriers to accessing education; reports reveal that fewer than 7 per cent of adolescent girls graduate from high school, one of the lowest rates in the world (Phillips, 2016). Adolescent girls in the Solomon Islands face greater challenges from the onset of puberty, such as limited access to school toilets and sanitary resources during menstruation. The UNICEF *Situation Analysis of Children in the Solomon Islands* report (2017) highlights that a lack of suitable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities compounded by a lack of limited access to sanitary materials during menstruation have negatively affected girls' attendance, resulting in their dropping out of school. Also, girls are exposed to greater risks of gender-based violence at home and while travelling to and from school. Gendered norms dictate the treatment of girls in the Solomon Islands, and they are subjected to early or forced marriage and early pregnancies and burdened with domestic duties that prevent them from accessing and completing secondary education (Asian Development Bank, 2015). According to a youth-led research project commissioned by Plan International Australia, which worked with 60 adolescent girls across three locations, the main reasons girls in the Solomon Islands are not attending schools are inability to afford school fees, social stigma and discrimination associated with girls who become pregnant due to pre-marital relationships, gender inequalities in terms of the traditional roles that girls and young women are expected to perform compared to boys and young men, and barriers faced by girls with disabilities. The government initiative Fee Free Basic Education, introduced in 2009, does not cater for senior secondary schooling, Years 10 to 12, which further excludes young adolescent girls from accessing senior secondary education. Bullying and harassment in schools, especially physical and verbal abuse by boys and the fear of travelling alone to and from school, also contributed to their missing school.

Quality of teaching

Another challenge facing the education system in the Solomon Islands is the quality of teaching. The Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resources *Performance Assessment Report 2015 & 2016* states that "the issue of the overall quality of teaching remains a major challenge. Teacher content knowledge, teaching skills, teacher ability to access in-service training, the quality of the teacher training opportunities and the difficulty [of] equitable allocation of trained and qualified teachers, particularly for remote schools has not been adequately addressed to date" (p. 54). The 2018 *Performance Assessment Report* suggests that the quality of teachers is affected by limited opportunities for pre-service training, as the Solomon Islands National University is the only institution providing teacher training in the country (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2018a). In-service professional development programmes provided by the government, for which scholarships are provided, enable only a few teachers to upgrade their qualifications to levels equivalent to those in Fiji or Papua New Guinea.

The report further states that the delivery of quality effective learning experiences by the teachers affects the quality of education in the Solomon Islands. Pre- and in-service professional development of teachers has been an ongoing issue and will continue to be one, as the current system does not have the capacity to deliver the required number of in-service re-training opportunities that will be needed to manage the planned curriculum reforms. The current in-service training initiatives are not flexible enough to produce the desired outcomes.

Initiatives to Improve Access to and Success in Education

Government expenditure on education

The Solomon Islands government continues to allocate a high proportion of its annual budget to education, with 33 per cent of its overall 2018 budget being allocated to education (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2018a). This consistently high percentage of government budget and expenditure on education demonstrates the government's ongoing commitment to making education a high priority.

Policies and programmes

Several policies and programmes are directly linked to efforts to improve access and success in schooling.

- In order to improve the state of education in the Solomon Islands, the MEHRD introduced the National Action Plan 2016–2020. The plan aims to improve educational outcomes by investing in capacity building for teachers, improving literacy skills, reducing gender inequality in literacy and enrolment and meeting the educational needs of the entire population. The government is strongly committed to providing all children with equitable

access to complete their education regardless of social, economic or other status (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2018b).

- Through the Extraordinary Learning Resources Project, funded by the governments of Australia and New Zealand, the Government of the Solomon Islands was able to purchase 500,000 books for primary and secondary schools, including learner and teacher guides to support the curriculum, to be distributed to all 1,032 schools in the Solomon Islands in 2019. This initiative was to support the implementation of the new curriculum in primary and junior secondary schools over the following years.
- More classrooms and schools have been built since 2007, and more students are attending primary and junior secondary education. The net enrolment rates for junior secondary education have been growing since 2010. Data from SEIMIS, reported in the *National Education Action Plan 2016–2020* (Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2016), suggest that the proportions of overage students in primary (19 per cent) and junior secondary (45 per cent) education have been growing. Repetition rates are high, while survival rates have improved, showing that 67 per cent of children who enter the preparatory class may successfully reach the end of Year 6 without repeating a year or dropping out.
- The Learn Play Project is an initiative of the Solomon Islands Football Federation that aims to keep rural and disadvantaged children in school or get students who have dropped out back into the education system. Capitalising on the teamwork and behavioural skills gained from playing football, similar concepts are used to motivate students to complete their secondary education.
- According to a World Bank report titled *Skills for Solomon Islands: Second chances, opening new opportunities* (2012), the Open Schooling Pilot Project provides adults in the Solomon Islands with an opportunity to be certified with an education up to Form 5 level. This initiative has been piloted in two secondary schools in Honiara. Completing students sit the same exam as Form 5 students, and if they pass, they can continue to Form 6 in regular classes. The approach uses school facilities in the afternoons from 2 pm to 7 pm and covers the same subjects offered to regular students, with four core and two optional subjects. Students can also take more subjects per term to complete their education faster. The classes are delivered by regular school teachers.
- The National Literacy Project Proposal is a collaborative, structured partnership approach between the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) and the Literacy Network Solomon Islands that is intended to provide a framework for establishing, implementing and monitoring effective community literacy classes nationwide. The objective is for all out-of-school Solomon Islanders over the age of 15 to be equipped with the literacy skills they need to improve their lives and be empowered to contribute to the future of the Solomon Islands.
- As part of the National Action Plan for 2016–2020, four key strategies have been developed as a focus for 2015–2030: quality, relevant and improved

learning; strengthened policies, plans and management systems; more emphasis on equity, inclusion and gender equality; and lifelong learning (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2016).

- There has been significant improvement in the participation of girls in junior secondary education, which is a result of expansion in the Community High Schools and Provincial Secondary Schools Network, which helps to accommodate students graduating from primary schools.
- The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development has made some improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in terms of increasing the number of qualified teachers; the available indicators show that the percentage of certified teachers in primary education increased from 8 per cent in 2006 to 64 per cent in 2014. Similarly, the proportion of certified teachers increased in junior secondary education to 77 per cent in 2014. Unfortunately, the quality and availability of teaching resources in primary and senior secondary schools did not seem to have improved since 2010. Teaching and learning resources are either outdated or inadequate in terms of numbers. The issue of inadequate textbooks, especially in senior secondary education, continues to challenge curriculum delivery, as schools have to photocopy existing books at considerable cost (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2016).
- The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development realises the importance of using Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as an enabling tool to work towards the strategic goal of providing the children of the Solomon Islands with universal access to quality basic and secondary education by 2030. The ICT in Education Master Plan 2019–2023 aims to achieve its goals of enhancing ICT infrastructure and connectivity to increase access to learning, including the use of digital resources in teaching and learning and enhancing the EMIS to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of use of education management resources (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2019a).
- In order to support inclusive education in the Solomon Islands, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development recently developed a National Learning Support Resource Centre which provides teachers with information related to inclusive education and encourages them to develop their own resources to support children with disabilities (Sharma et al., 2016).

Concluding Remarks

Even though education is free in the Solomon Islands, the associated indirect costs of schooling are major barriers to access to primary and secondary education in the country. Other factors that affect access to education and prevent children from attending school or continuing their education include parents not placing importance on their children's education, students' lack of interest in their education, teacher absenteeism and corporal punishment in schools.

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CHAPTER

8

Tonga:
Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific

Executive Summary

The focus of the Ministry of Education in Tonga is to improve student learning and the quality of education. Increasing student enrolment rates, attainment levels and participation levels in education have been some of the key priorities for the government to date. Much has been accomplished in the education sector in Tonga as a result of efforts made by the government, the international community, civil society and the private sector. Much more, however, needs to be done.

While an overall improvement in access to basic education has been noted at the primary and lower-secondary levels, a consistent pattern for completion rates for boys and girls has been noted, with more boys than girls dropping out of schools.

Additionally, recent research indicates that approximately 3 per cent of the population has never attended school. According to a report produced by the Tonga Statistics Department titled *Tonga's Youth* (Tonga Statistics Department, 2019b), young people start to leave the education system around the age of 15 and the gender gap starts to widen at the age of 18, when more boys than girls leave school prematurely. Male students leave school and move into various forms of employment while young women often stay home.

Some schools are under-resourced and running on a low budget. Concerns have been raised about under-qualified teachers in non-government secondary schools contributing to low learning outcomes as evidenced by the high repetition rates and low literacy rates of students (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013).

According to the 2016 census report, primary enrolment rates were 100 per cent, indicating that everyone aged between 5 and 13 was attending school, and

80.4 per cent of students aged 13–18 were enrolled in secondary education. The 2016 census also reveals that students mostly drop out of school towards the end of Forms 5 and 6 (Tonga Statistics Department, 2017).

Second-chance education is provided in Tonga to youth who drop out of schools in the form of community resource centres — for example, the Ahopanilolo Technical Institute, Montfort Boys Town, Tonga Maritime Polytechnic Institute and theological schools, which offer some forms of TVET and non-formal education programmes. However, there is a need to provide educational opportunities (e.g., vocational and non-formal) in rural and urban areas that would encourage youth to continue their education and gain work and life skills.

Country Profile: Geography and Demographics

The kingdom of Tonga is the only kingdom located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean in the Polynesian region (see Figure 22). The country has a constitutional monarchy, established in 1875, and is a member of the Commonwealth. It has 170 islands, about 36 of which are inhabited. Tonga is made up of three main island groups: Tongatapu, Ha'apai and Vava'uk. The capital, Nukualofa, is located on Tongatapu. The country's official languages are Tongan and English. Economically, the country relies on agriculture for its main source of income, followed by timber, livestock and fishing.

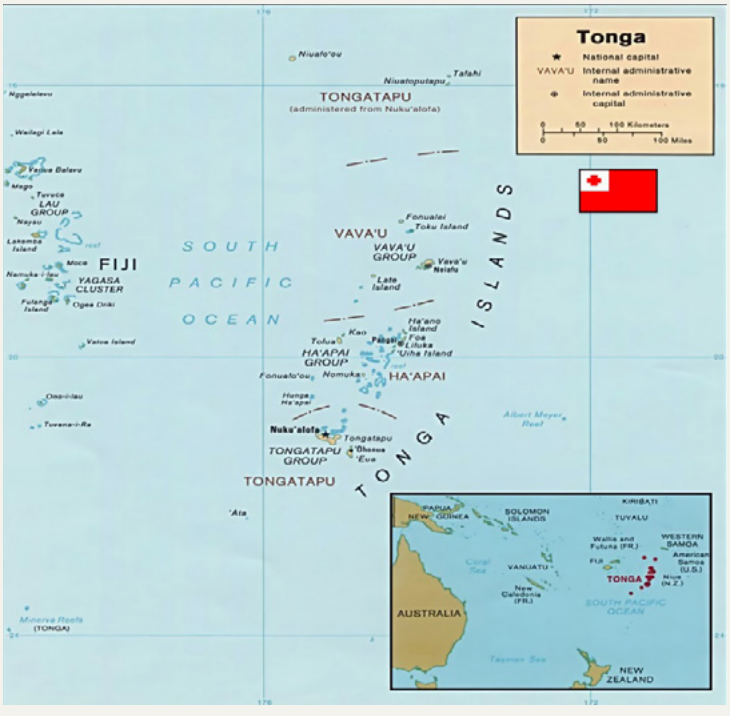

Figure 22: Map of Tonga

Source: Mapsland (2021). (Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Licence)

According to the Census of Population and Housing, the population of Tonga in 2016 was estimated at 100,651 compared to 103,252 in 2011 (Tonga Statistics Department, 2017). These numbers show a decrease of 2.6 per cent, or 2,601 people, between 2011 and 2016 and an average annual decline of 0.5 per cent. More than 70 per cent of the population is located on Tongatapu. Tonga has a very young population, with more than 39 per cent aged 15 years or younger and only 9 per cent above the age of 60. The disability data reveal that 10 per cent of the total population reported having a disability at the time of the census, which was 2 per cent higher than the figure reported for the 2011 census.

Climate change and natural disasters pose serious challenges to the lives and livelihoods of the people of Tonga. Tonga is extremely vulnerable to natural hazards and has experienced approximately 15 natural disasters since 1997. The most destructive cyclone it has experienced was Tropical Cyclone Gita in 2017, which caused massive destruction across Tongatapu with damages equivalent to 15 per cent of Tonga's GDP.

The key economic activities for Tonga are agriculture and fisheries; these sectors account for about 20 per cent of GDP and employment in them is dominated by men. The majority (75 per cent) of the population in Tonga resides in rural areas and depends on agriculture and fisheries for their livelihood. Foreign remittances constitute a substantial portion of Tonga's economic growth: Tonga received the equivalent of 30.2 per cent of GDP in remittances in 2016, which is considered the "highest for any Pacific Island Country" (Tonga Statistics Department, 2017, p. 11).

Over 56 per cent of Tonga's population is below the age of 24, and the majority face poor labour market outcomes. A large number fail to successfully transition into employment, or are either unemployed or inactive in the labour market (the labour force participation rate in 2018 was only 24 per cent according to estimates by the International Labour Organization). Gender disparities exist in the labour market: in 2019 the labour force participation rate for women was 48 per cent compared to 76 per cent for men (World Bank, 2020c).

Overview of the Education Sector in Tonga

In Tonga, the education system is governed by the *Education Act* of 2013. Education is compulsory from ages 4 to 18. The six-tiered education system has early childhood education (ECE) from ages 3 to 5, primary education from ages 6 to 12, secondary education from ages 13 to 18, tertiary education from ages 19 to 24, and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and non-formal education for ages 15 and above. It is compulsory for all students to complete 15 years of basic schooling in Tonga.

Tonga's Youth: Analysis of the situation of young people based on the 2016 Population and Housing Census suggests that young people begin to drop out of school from the age of 15 and by the time they reach 17, around 28 per cent have already left school. More young men than young women tend to drop out of school. After the age of 16, only 76 per cent of male students were still attending school compared to 86 per cent of female students. By the age of 18, or at the end of secondary school,

only 54 per cent of male students were still in school compared to 65 per cent of female students (Tonga Statistics Department, 2019b).

Tonga sees teacher education as an integral component of human resource development in its education system and believes that an improvement in the quality of teachers will have a positive impact on the quality of student achievement (Ministry of Education, 2015). A certified teacher in Tonga is one who has undertaken some form of teacher training from the National Teacher Institute or any other teaching institute in the country. According to the *Annual Statistical Digest of 2014* published by the Ministry of Education in 2015, the number of students to certified teacher ratio was 23:1 for primary schools and 21:1 for secondary schools in 2014. The student to qualified teacher ratio for secondary schools was 49:1.

Number of schools in Tonga

According to the available data for 2014 from the *Annual Statistical Digest*, a total of 73 early childhood centres, 132 primary schools and 54 secondary schools made up the education system in Tonga. In the higher education sector, there are four universities located on Tongatapu: Atenisi University, Tonga Institute of Higher Education, Tupou Tertiary Institute, Unuaki o Tonga and the University of the South Pacific Extension Centre (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Table 70: Number of Schools in Tonga by Education Level, 2014

District	ECE	Primary	Secondary
Tongatapu	47	65	32
Vava'u	14	34	10
Ha'apai	5	22	7
Eua	5	6	3
Niua's	2	5	2
Total	73	132	54

Source: Ministry of Education (2015)

School enrolment

According to the 2016 Population and Housing Census, 10 per cent of the population in Tonga has a disability. The census figures reveal that 94.5 per cent of the population aged 5–14 was enrolled in schools and that school attendance and enrolment declined after the age of 15 — 29 per cent of people in the 15–19-year-old age group were not attending school. There were more female students than male students attending schools.

Table 71: School Population in Tonga, 2016

School Attendance	Total	3–4 Years Old	5–9 Years Old	10–14 Years Old	15–19 Years Old	20–24 Years Old	25–29 Years Old	30–34 Years Old	35–39 Years Old	40–44 Years Old	45–49 Years Old	50–54 Years Old	55–60 Years Old	60–64 Years Old	65+ Years Old
Total	92,846	5,072	12,149	11,873	10,493	8,202	6,585	6,490	5,605	5,157	5,132	4,119	3,231	2,680	6,058
Currently Attending School	34,119	1,135	11,069	11,652	7,653	1,565	349	228	143	93	72	66	31	22	41
Not Currently Attending School	58,727	3,937	1,080	221	2,840	6,637	6,236	6,262	5,462	5,064	5,060	4,053	3,200	2,658	6,017
Male	46,096	2,550	6,416	6,133	5,442	4,085	3,126	2,977	2,673	2,455	2,559	2,103	1,554	1,286	2,737
Currently Attending School	17,397	547	5,828	6,009	3,783	718	182	92	74	45	41	37	14	9	18
Not Currently Attending School	28,699	2,003	588	124	1,659	3,367	2,944	2,885	2,599	2,410	2,518	2,066	1,540	1,277	2,719
Female	46,750	2,522	5,733	5,740	5,051	4,117	3,459	3,513	2,932	2,702	2,573	2,016	1,677	1,394	3,321
Currently Attending School	16,722	588	5,241	5,643	3,870	847	167	136	69	48	31	29	17	13	23
Not Currently Attending School	30,028	1,934	492	97	1,181	3,270	3,292	3,377	2,863	2,654	2,542	1,987	1,660	1,381	3,298

Source: Tonga Statistics Department (2017)

Key Education Statistics

Attendance ratios for secondary school

The net attendance ratio (Table 72) shows that 84.6 per cent of female students and 79.3 per cent of male students were enrolled in schools in 2016. The net attendance ratio was the same in rural and urban areas. For male students, however, a difference between rural and urban secondary school attendance was noted. The gross attendance ratio (GAR) shows the number of students over the official age of 13–18 years attending secondary school. The GAR for girls was recorded at 100.9 per cent and for boys it was 109 per cent. The gap between the NAR and GAR suggests that a proportion of secondary students are not in school. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2021), the GAR can exceed 100 per cent due to the inclusion of underaged, overaged or repeating students.

Table 72: NER and GER for Tonga

	Total Population Aged 13–18		Total Population Aged 13–18 Attending Secondary School		Total Population Attending Secondary School (any age)		Net Attendance Ratio (%)		Gross Attendance Ratio (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Tonga	6,936	6,421	5,499	5,435	7,000	6,998	79.3	84.6	100.9	109.0
Urban	1,554	1,397	1,280	1,185	1,592	543	82.4	84.8	102.4	38.9
Rural	5,382	5,024	4,219	4,250	5,408	6,455	78.4	84.6	100.5	128.5

Source: Tonga Statistics Department (2019b)

Out-of-school children and youths

The following table summarises the status of OOSC in Tonga.

Table 73: OOSC Indicators for Tonga, 2014, 2015

	2014	2015
Out-of-School Children of Primary School-Age, Both Sexes (number)	—	163.0
Out-of-School Adolescents of Lower-Secondary School-Age, Female (number)	—	228.0
Out-of-School Adolescents of Lower-Secondary School-Age, Male (number)	—	338.0
Out-of-School Adolescents of Lower-Secondary School-Age, Both Sexes (number)	191.0	566.0
Out-of-School Youth of Upper-Secondary School-Age, Both Sexes (number)	2,158.0	1,580.0
Out-of-School Youth of Upper-Secondary School-Age, Female (number)	945.0	660.0
Out-of-School Youth of Upper-Secondary School-Age, Male (number)	1,213.0	920.0

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020)

School attendance for people with disabilities

The *Tonga Disability Survey Report* (Tonga Statistics Department, 2018a) indicates that there are disparities between people with disabilities and people without disabilities in Tonga. The data reveal that people with disabilities are under-represented in the education sector, as they have lower rates of participation in education.

Table 74 (below) shows school attendance data for people with and without a disability. The data show that only 6.6 per cent of children with a disability are currently in school compared to 38 per cent without a disability. The data on school completion rates show that more children without a disability had completed school than children with a disability. According to a 2019 report titled *Disability in Tonga* (Tonga Statistics Department, 2019a), people with disabilities are more likely than people without disabilities to have never attended school (8.1 per cent compared to 5.8 per cent). According to the report, adults with a disability tend to have a lower level of education outcome when compared to the total population.

Among those who dropped out of school, a higher percentage (61.2 per cent) was recorded for those with disabilities compared to those without disabilities (30.4 per cent). The *Tonga Disability Survey Report* (Tonga Statistics Department, 2018a) reveals that students with disabilities are more likely to drop out of school because challenges related to their disability are exacerbated by physical barriers, issues related to school accessibility and curriculum accessibility, all of which affect their access to and participation in education.

Table 74: School Attendance Differentiated by Disability, Tonga, 2018

	No Functional Disability (%)			With Functional Difficulty (%)			Total		
School Attendance	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Currently Attending	40.1	36.7	38.3	8.6	4.6	6.6	37.5	34.3	35.9
Completed School	23.1	27.4	25.4	25.1	23.2	24.2	23.3	27.1	25.3
Dropped Out of School	30.9	30.0	30.4	58.3	64.0	61.2	33.1	32.5	32.8
Never Attended School	5.9	5.8	5.8	8.0	8.2	8.1	6.1	6.0	6.0

Source: Tonga Statistics Department (2018a)

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Infrastructure of Tonga

Mobile services in Tonga are provided by three operators: Tonga Communications Corporation (TCC), Shoreline Communications Limited and DIGICEL (International Telecommunications Union, 2018). TCC and DIGICEL provide Wi-Fi access throughout the Central Business District of Nuku'alofa. TCC has a fibre-optic backbone on the island of Tongatapu and uses microwave and satellite for backbone transmission to other islands. According to the International Telecommunications Union report published in 2018, an 827-kilometre undersea fibre-optic cable links

Tonga to Fiji. From Fiji, onward connectivity is provided via the Southern Cross cable to Australia and the United States. The cable is owned and operated by Tonga Cable Limited (TCL), whose shareholders are the Kingdom of Tonga (83 per cent) and TCC (17 per cent). TCL is extending the submarine cable to the outer island groups of Vava'u and Ha'apai.

The Government of Tonga is committed to providing faster Internet speeds and higher bandwidth at affordable prices for the people in Tonga via the development of a USD32.8 million submarine cable system. This project is being supported by the World Bank Group, Asian Development Bank and Tonga Communications Corporation. Additionally, the Kacific Broadband Satellite Group has signed a 15-year agreement with Tonga Satellite Limited to provide high-speed broadband via satellite to the Pacific Islands. It is hoped that the bandwidth supplied by Kacific will be used to provide 89 remote outer islands with high-speed Internet access (Kacific, 2019).

Key indicators

The following table summarises key ICT indicators for Tonga.

Table 75: Key ICT Indicators for Tonga

		Tonga	Asia & Pacific	World
Fixed Telephone Subscriptions per 100 Inhabitants		8.3	9.5	13.0
Mobile-Cellular Subscriptions per 100 Inhabitants		80.5	104.0	103.6
Active Mobile Broadband Subscriptions per 100 Inhabitants		59.2	60.3	61.9
3G Coverage (% of population)		95.0	91.3	87.9
LTE/WiMAX Coverage (% of population)		65.0	86.9	76.3
Individuals Using the Internet (%)		41.2	44.3	48.6
Households with a Computer (%)		40.5	38.9	47.1
Households with Internet Access (%)		47.2	49.0	54.7
International Bandwidth per Internet User (Kbit/s)		34.1	61.7	76.6
Fixed-Broadband Subscriptions per 100 Inhabitants		2.8	13.0	13.6
Fixed-Broadband Subscriptions (2019)				2,519
Secure Internet Servers (2019)				24
Fixed-Broadband Subscriptions by Speed Tiers, % Distribution	256 Kbit/s to 2 Mbit/s	53.6	2.4	4.2
	2 to 10 Mbit/s	31.5	7.6	13.2
	equal to or above 10 Mbit/s	14.9	90.0	82.6

Source: World Bank, 2021

Internet access

Table 76 (below) shows rates of access to and location of Internet connectivity.

Table 76: Internet Access and Location in Tonga

		Tonga
Internet Access	Total	75,625
	Yes	23,247
	No	52,378
Location of Accessing the Internet	Total	23,247
	Home	15,959
	Internet Cafe	668
	Free Wireless Hotspot	985
	Workplace	3,390
	At Place of Education	878
	Others	1,367

Source: Tonga Statistics Department (2017)

ICT in education

All secondary schools in Tonga are connected to the Internet via TCC, and most primary and secondary schools have computers acquired via donations. Computer science forms part of the curriculum in secondary schools. Post-secondary educational institutions such as USP and the Tonga Institute of Higher Education offer computer science courses and some Church schools and private companies offer diploma programmes (Minges & Stork, 2015).

Challenges in Education

Structural challenges

Like many other Pacific Island countries, Tonga experiences several factors that constrain development in various sectors of the country. The geographically dispersed population in the remote and outer islands makes the provision of essential services such as health, utilities and education as well as the delivery of goods including essential items like food, medicines and fuel challenging (Kingdom of Tonga, 2019). The *Situation Analysis of Children in Tonga* (UNICEF, 2017) indicates that even though the Ministry of Education has established reforms to increase accessibility, equity and quality basic education, some serious challenges are undermining its efforts to sustain progress in this area. Of particular concern is the provision of access to quality education in rural areas, especially on small remote

islands. Tonga has a limited number of secondary schools in rural areas, so students may have to travel long distances to get to school, which contributes to low enrolment and high dropout rates. The *Tonga Millennium Development Goals Final Report* (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2015) states that the limited number of secondary schools affects female participation in secondary education.

Access to ECE centres

ECE centres are mostly concentrated in urban areas and on Tongatapu. Access to ECE in remote and rural areas is limited, which presents a barrier to the achievement of universal ECE enrolment and attendance in Tonga. Learning resources and the use of technology are both limited in these areas, which affects the quality of and access to ECE. Moreover, lack of attendance in ECE is also exacerbated by the attitudes of parents, many of whom think that ECE is not an important component of their children's development (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2015).

Dropout rates in Tonga

There are issues associated with enrolments and dropouts related to secondary education. The report on the Tonga 2016 Census of Population and Housing (Tonga Statistics Department, 2017) highlights that primary enrolments are high — 100 per cent of those between the ages of 5 and 13 are currently attending school — but only 80.4 per cent of students aged 13–18 are currently enrolled in secondary school in Tonga. The census shows that the majority of the students leave school prematurely, particularly towards the end of Form 5 (when they sit the exam for the Tonga School Certificate) and towards the end of Form 6 (when they sit the exam for the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate).

The census also reveals that 30 per cent of secondary schools in Tonga are run by the government, and the rest are privately owned. Enrolment in public secondary schools is based on merit and school fees are subsidised for students. A number of factors contribute to the issue of school dropouts in Tonga — for example, financial difficulties faced by parents in sending their children to school, a desire to join the labour force, lack of motivation to study and an attitude that schools are not preparing students for the workforce. Additionally, only a small number of students are able to pass their external examination, which further contributes to the dropout rate as students drop out just before and after the examination period. Education is seen to have a close relationship with employability, as "70.4 percent of the unemployed covered in the 2013 labor force survey had left school prematurely" (World Bank, 2018b, p. 12). The World Bank (2018b) report also highlighted that there are not many initiatives in place to prevent school dropouts in Tonga. As per the *Tonga Labour Force Survey* report published in 2018, the labour force participation rate stood at 46.7 per cent in 2018 (56.2 per cent for men and 38.4 per cent for women). The people who had attained the highest level of tertiary qualifications had the highest labour force participation rates (recorded at 67.9 per cent, followed by 48 per cent for those who had completed secondary education). Those

who had completed primary education or less than primary education recorded lower labour force participation rates, 39.7 per cent and 14.9 per cent respectively.

People with a disability are more likely to drop out of school compared to people without a disability because of their illness or their disability. The data in Table 77 (below) show that 23.7 per cent of people with a disability dropped out of school to help out at home compared to 21.7 per cent without a disability.

Table 77: Reasons for Dropping Out of School in Tonga

Reasons for Dropping Out of School	No Functional Difficulty			With Functional Difficulty			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Dislike School Environment	5.7	4.2	4.9	4.5	6.0	5.3	5.6	4.5	5.0
School Is Too Far	2.3	2.0	2.2	3.1	4.0	3.6	2.4	2.3	2.4
No School Uniform	1.1	1.4	1.3	1.7	1.1	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.3
No Tuition Fees	17.4	21.1	19.3	15.3	18.3	16.8	17.1	20.7	18.9
Underachiever/Not Interested in School	35.7	32.8	34.2	26.2	22.9	24.4	34.3	31.4	32.8
Working to Contribute to Family Income	12.0	8.2	10.0	16.3	6.0	10.9	12.6	7.8	10.2
Migration	1.6	2.2	1.9	0.8	1.6	1.2	1.5	2.1	1.8
Dormitory Is Not Available	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Help at Home with Household Activities and on the Farm	20.5	22.9	21.7	20.1	26.9	23.7	20.4	23.5	22.0
Family Does Not Allow Schooling	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.9	0.6	0.3	0.7	0.5
Illness	0.9	2.4	1.7	3.7	5.5	4.7	1.3	2.9	2.1
Disabled	0.1	0.0	0.1	4.7	3.4	4.0	0.8	0.5	0.6
Bullied	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1
Corporal Punishment	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.8	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.1	0.3
Others	1.6	2.1	1.9	2.0	2.9	2.5	1.7	2.2	2.0

Source: Tonga Statistics Department (2018a)

Initiatives to Improve Access to and Success in Education

The Skills and Employment for Tongans (SET) project is an initiative funded by the International Development Association, the World Bank and the Australia-Pacific Islands Partnership Trust Fund (World Bank, 2020b). It aims to address Tonga's high secondary school dropout rates (fundsforNGOs, 2018).

SET is coordinated by Tonga's Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Training, the latter of which addresses the secondary school dropout rates in Tonga and ensures that students who have dropped out of secondary school have alternative vocational and learning pathways. This project also aims to increase secondary school progression and facilitate the transition to jobs for Tongans in the domestic and international labour markets (World Bank, 2020b).

As part of this project, the Government of Tonga and the World Bank have provided conditional cash transfers to 1,162 Tongan households with the aim of reducing the financial barriers faced by families in sending their children to school (World Bank, 2020a). As part of this project, the World Bank is helping the Tongan government to implement the cash transfer programme, with the main recurring payments of TOP250 (USD110) designed to assist with school fees and other educational costs for more than 2,000 Tongan high school students. An additional one-off payment of TOP200 is also provided to help vulnerable Tongan families deal with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the government is supporting TVET programmes throughout the country. Under the SET Project, 125 students studying in TVET institutions throughout Tonga will have their course fees paid (World Bank, 2020b).

Concluding Remarks

Tonga has implemented several initiatives to improve the education sector, but there is a need for a stronger emphasis on improving transition and completion rates, especially in secondary education.

Even though net enrolment ratios in primary education were high in Tonga between 2000 and 2015, with most of the students enrolled each year reaching the final grade, the number of students dropping out of the education system is still a concern. Students drop out of school for a number of reasons, most often because their parents take them out of school to take care of family needs, students lose interest in education, parents do not value their children's education, teaching is inadequate and inappropriate, there is no school nearby, school costs present a financial burden to parents and schools are seen as not preparing the students for the job market and the outside world.

There is limited evidence of second-chance education opportunities to re-engage students who have dropped out of education. Targeted interventions are needed for those at risk of dropping out of the education system, the poorest of the poor, the most vulnerable and students living with a disability.

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CHAPTER

9

Tuvalu:
Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the Pacific

Executive Summary

Tuvalu has made some progress in expanding and improving access to education, particularly in early childhood care and education (ECCE), and ensuring that all ECCE teachers are now qualified to teach in ECCE centres throughout the country. Primary education is free for all as well.

The transition rates from primary to secondary schools have been gradually increasing, but a clear picture of the actual transition rates cannot be gauged as some children are sent overseas to complete their secondary education. In 2019 the gross enrolment rate (GER) for primary education was 108.83 and for secondary education, 41.13 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020). The net enrolment rate (NER) in 2019 for primary education was 89 per cent and for secondary education, 62 per cent. The NER for secondary education remained below 70 per cent between 2012 and 2017 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2017a; World Bank, 2020).

One of the pressing issues facing the education sector in Tuvalu is the number of students dropping out of schools at the secondary level. Even though the Government of Tuvalu provides free primary education for all, parents are required by the schools to make a small contribution of between AUD2 and AUD5 per term (Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Industries, 2017). Secondary education, on the other hand, is available to those who complete primary education and can afford the annual fees of AUD150 (UNICEF, 2017). The *Situation Analysis of Children in Tuvalu* report (UNICEF, 2017) states that students drop out of school because of their families' poor socio-economic status and their inability to afford the indirect costs of education — for example, school uniforms, stationery, lunches, transportation, sports fees and examination fees — and the lack of value placed on

education. There is gender parity in ECCE and primary education, though more boys than girls drop out of secondary education, with gender parity ranging between 1.27 and 1.55 between 2012 and 2017 (World Bank, 2020). Bullying in schools is also a contributor to dropout rates at the secondary level.

The key priorities for improvement in education that have emerged from educational reports on Tuvalu include the need for teacher training at all levels of education, enhancement of vocational and life skills education strategies and opportunities and more teachers.

Country Profile: Geography and Demographics

Considered one of the world's smallest and most isolated island nations, Tuvalu lies in the western Pacific (UNICEF, 2017). A former British colony known as the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Tuvalu is now an independent constitutional monarchy. It is made up of nine inhabited low-lying atolls in the South Pacific with a combined population of 10,645 (5,486 male inhabitants and 5,159 female) according to the *2017 Population and Housing Mini-Census Preliminary Report* (Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Industries, 2017). Most of the population resides on the main island, Funafuti.

With most of the country lying just above sea level (the average elevation is one metre above sea level and the highest point just four metres above sea level), Tuvalu is extremely vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change and rising sea levels (World Bank, 2020).

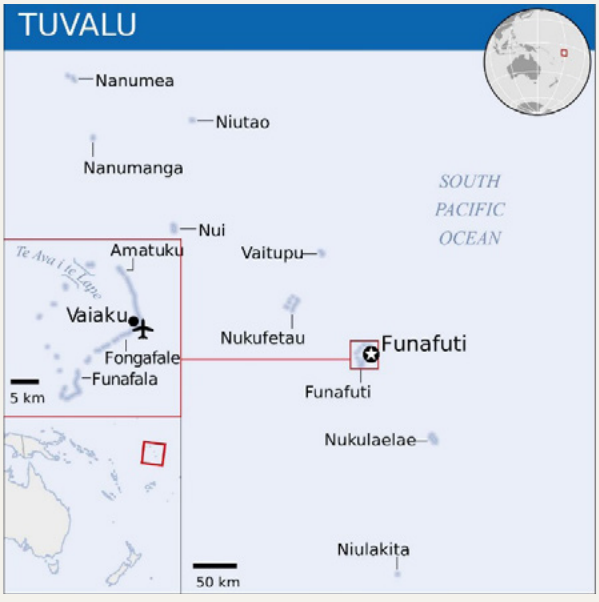

Figure 23: Map of Tuvalu

Source: Mapsland (2021). (Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Licence)

Overview of the Education Sector in Tuvalu

Primary education

Primary education, which consists of eight years of schooling for children aged 6 to 13, is both free and compulsory in Tuvalu (UNICEF, 2017). To increase access to primary education, the Government of Tuvalu pays all the tuition fees, book costs and teachers' salaries with support from its development partners. However, parents are required to pay a school contribution of between AUD2 and AUD5 per term. Secondary education comprises five years of schooling, from Year 9 to Year 13.

Secondary education

Senior secondary school consists of three years (Years 11, 12 and 13). At the end of Year 12, students sit the Tuvalu Senior Secondary Certificate (TSSC) examination which determines if they will continue to Year 13 or enrol in the franchised programme for the Certificate IV programmes. Students sit the South Pacific Form Seven Certificate (SPFSC) examination at the end of Year 13. After successfully completing Year 13 the students may pursue higher education.

Tertiary education

Those who successfully complete the Year 11 and Year 12 programmes can apply for pre-tertiary opportunities. A total of 3,103 students were enrolled in early childhood care and education, secondary, special needs and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes in 2017. The TVET stream, which is part of the primary school curriculum, acts as an alternative learning programme for students who may not excel academically. There is one government-funded TVET provider, the Tuvalu Maritime Training Institute (TMTI), and two privately operated TVET schools that teach computing/typing and bookkeeping; all three are located in Funafuti. The University of the South Pacific has a Funafuti campus which provides certificate-, diploma- and degree-level courses through face-to-face teaching and distance learning modes (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2017a).

The largest share of the annual budget is absorbed by the education sector and amounted to AUD9.2 million in 2019, an increase of almost AUD1.2 million or 15 per cent from the revised budget of 2018 (Government of Tuvalu, 2019).

Other post-secondary education

The Department of Education has established Community Training Centres (CTS) in primary schools. Students who do not pass the National Year Eight Examinations, Tuvalu Junior Secondary Examination and Tuvalu Senior Secondary Certificate Examination are "re-routed" to these centres to follow TVET courses. There is only one special needs centre in Tuvalu to cater for people with disabilities; its current enrolment is 20 people (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2017a).

Key Education Statistics

Access to and participation in education

Table 78 (below) summarises some key indicators regarding access to and participation in the Tuvalu education system.

Table 78: Enrolment and Retention Rates in Tuvalu

Indicators	2015	2016	2017
Enrolment			
ECCE	698	696	627
Male	356	360	307
Female	342	336	320
Primary	1,729	1,733	1,780
Male	895	904	954
Female	834	829	826
Secondary	705	653	642
Male	318	301	280
Female	387	352	362
Special Needs Schools	13	18	20
Male	8	11	12
Female	5	7	8
TVSD	0	43	34
Primary	0	7	16
Secondary	0	36	18
Total Enrolment Tuvalu	3,145	3,143	3,103
% of New Entrants in Year 1 with ECCE Experience	85	87	93
Enrolment Rates			
Gross Enrolment in ECCE	107.72	105.94	94
Net Enrolment in ECCE	85.19	81.13	72.26
Gender Parity Index GER ECCE	1.05	1.03	1.14
Gross Enrolment in Primary	106.86	106.91	109.94
Net Enrolment in Primary	94.25	95.99	99.38
Gender Parity Index GER in Primary 1–8	1.04	1.01	0.95
Gross Enrolment in Secondary	72.31	69.99	71.02
Net Enrolment in Secondary	61.03	60.02	58.08
Gender Parity Index GER in Secondary 9–13	1.32	1.32	1.48
Retention Rates			
Completion Rate to Year 8	95.1	92.8	92.8
Transition Rate Primary–Secondary	61.7	63.7	65.1
Repetition Rate Year 8	10	10.55	8.80

Source: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2017a

Based on the data given above, the GER for ECCE is high, implying that most young children are enrolled in ECCE programmes. However, the NER is slightly lower, indicating that there are some students who may be outside the appropriate preschool age group (between 3 and 5 years), meaning there are more underage and overage children enrolled in ECCE centres in Tuvalu.

The privately run special needs school in Tuvalu currently has 20 students (12 male and 8 female). Three children were mainstreamed into formal schooling at the start of the 2015 academic year by being enrolled in one of the primary schools in Funafuti.

Table 79: School Attendance in Tuvalu

	3–5 Years Old (%)		6–13 Years Old (%)		14–18 Years Old (%)		19–29 Years Old (%)	
	2012	2017	2012	2017	2012	2017	2012	2017
Attended	95.6	94.5	98.5	98	71.4	74.8	8.9	8.3
Did Not Attend	4.4	5.5	1.5	2.0	28.6	25.2	91.1	91.7

Source: Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Industries (2017)

There appears to be a trend in the two census activities whereby attendance is high in the primary level but begins to decline at the start of the secondary level. However, a slight improvement in enrolment can be noticed at the secondary level, from 71 per cent in 2012 to 74 per cent in 2017.

Table 80 (below) shows enrolment data at the primary level.

Table 80: GER and NER at the Primary Level in Tuvalu

Year	Sex	Official Enrolment	Population Aged 6–13	GER (%)	NER (%)	GPI: GER	GPI: NER
2016	Male	934	964	106.60	96.93		
	Female	844	889	107.24	94.95		
	Total	1,778	1,853	106.91	95.99	1.01	0.98
2017	Male	1,086	1,074	112.63	101.06		
	Female	562	884	106.99	97.54		
	Total	1,948	1,958	109.94	99.38	0.95	0.97

Source: TEMIS 2018, adapted from Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2017a

In both years, for primary education, the GER has surpassed 100 per cent, which means that Tuvalu can accommodate its primary school-age population. There is not a huge difference between the GER and NER for primary education. Nevertheless, the difference does indicate that there are several under- and over-age students in primary schools. The GPI for the GER is between 0.98 and 1.01, which indicates that there is gender parity.

Table 81 (below) explores enrolment at the secondary level.

Table 81: GER and NER at the Secondary Level in Tuvalu

Year	Sex	Official Enrolment	Population Aged 14–18	GER (%)	NER (%)	GPI: GER	GPI: NER
2016	Male	96	183	60.93	52.23		
	Female	194	282	80.18	68.79		
	Total	290	466	69.99	60.02	1.32	1.32
2017	Male	78	162	57.97	48.03		
	Female	217	311	85.99	69.60		
	Total	295	474	71.02	58.08	1.48	1.45

Source: TEMIS 2018, adapted from Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2017a

Based on the data given in the table above, there is a huge gap between the GER and NER in secondary education, signalling that there are many under- and overage students in secondary schools across the country.

Out-of-school children

Even though the Ministry of Education in Tuvalu has introduced a number of policies and reforms since 2012 such as the school grant policy, revised primary curriculum, ECCE development framework and improvement in teacher training, the out-of-school rate for primary and secondary education remains high. The data available for 2018 show that a total of 219 adolescents were out of school in 2018. The gender difference in the dropout numbers reflects that more boys than girls dropped out before completing their secondary education in 2018.

Table 82: OOSC in Tuvalu

		2014	2015	2016	2018
Out-of-School: Primary	Total	131	71	178	—
	Female	71	49	113	—
	Male	60	22	65	—
Out-of-School: Adolescents	Total	164	76	282	219
	Female	66	—	115	107
	Male	98	—	167	112

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020)

Teachers' Qualifications in Tuvalu

Table 83 (below) summarises the qualifications of teachers by level.

Table 83: Teachers' Qualifications by Level in Tuvalu

Indicators		2015	2016	2017
% of Qualified Teachers	ECCE	66	66	71
	Primary	111	115	100
	Secondary	61	56	48
% of Certified Teachers	ECCE	100	100	100
	Primary	100	97	86
	Secondary	100	72	63
Teachers Attended In-Service Teacher Training	ECCE	0	0	2
	Primary	4	16	20
	Secondary	10	1	NA

Source: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2017a

Based on the data given above, all the teachers teaching in primary schools were certified to teach, compared to 71 per cent of teachers in ECCE and 48 per cent of teachers in secondary education. A certified teacher in Tuvalu is identified as a teacher who has undertaken specialised post-secondary teacher training and has met the course requirements, with or without other post-secondary qualifications.

ICT and Internet Access in Tuvalu

Tuvalu is considered one of the least connected countries in the Pacific as Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are costly and not readily available or accessible. This is particularly the case outside the main island of Funafuti, and it hinders the provision of services such as education, health care and business across the archipelago (UNESCAP, 2018). Table 84 (below) shows access to ICTs in the region for 2017 and 2019. The data for 2018 were not available.

Table 84: ICT and Internet Access in Tuvalu

Fixed Broadband Subscriptions (per 100 people)	10% (2019)
Fixed Broadband Subscriptions	450 (2017)
Internet User Penetration	46% (2019)
Mobile Subscriber Penetration	31% (2019)

Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2019); International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Development Report and Database (2021)

The data presented in the table above give an overview of ICT access and penetration rates in Tuvalu from 2017 to 2019. The Government of Tuvalu places a high priority on improving ICT infrastructure in the country, but because of its geographic location and fragmentation across nine islands and atolls, mobile subscriber figures currently stand at 31 per cent and Internet penetration at 46 per cent. With high Internet costs and limited availability of Internet services, Tuvalu is considered one of the least connected island countries in the world (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2019).

Challenges in Education

Inadequate access to education

The development challenges are further intensified in the outer islands, where residents face poor access to and quality of services and opportunities such as paid employment. The wide dispersal of the population across the nine islands and the high concentration of services on Funafuti means inadequate access to education, health and other basic services for the population outside of Funafuti (Asian Development Bank, 2008).

Quality of primary education

The quality of primary education remains a key concern in Tuvalu. There is a need to invest in learning resources in primary education in order to improve education standards. Studies conducted in Tuvalu highlight poor performance in examinations as a contributor to school dropouts and low secondary enrolment. Encouragingly, the introduction of TVET and outcomes-based education have emerged as crucial reforms in this area, but it is not possible to address dropout and enrolment rates without improving the quality of education.

Marginalisation of children with disabilities

Children with disabilities are the most marginalised group in Tuvalu. A study conducted in 2018 for Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development titled *Tuvalu Study on People with Disabilities* reported that although the Department of Education has positive intentions to develop and implement policies to address inclusive education, children with disabilities are not well served by the education sector (Tavola, 2018). The same report further states that children with disabilities attend school, but most do not receive any specialised attention and are therefore left behind and leave school with inadequate levels of education. One of the study's recommendations for improving the lives of people with disabilities is that the Department of Education in Tuvalu should improve educational opportunities for children with disabilities. The aim, ultimately, is to build an inclusive society by encouraging more teachers to train in inclusive education and providing in-service training on inclusive education to teachers so that they are trained to identify children with disabilities and equipped with the skills required to address particular learning needs.

Reasons for students dropping out of school

Dropout rates pose a challenge at the secondary level. While access to primary education is high across Tuvalu, there has been a decline in net enrolment rates for secondary education. The decline has serious implications for human resource development and the flow of skilled graduates ready and available to enter the labour market, take up key leadership positions and influence future directions for economic growth. Research in this aspect indicates that some students fail to attend schools because their parents cannot afford the indirect costs: school uniforms, school stationery, lunches, transport to and from schools, parent-teacher association funds, field trips, sports gear, examination fees and many other miscellaneous costs. The quality of learning has also been identified as a possible cause of student dropouts, as students who start to fall behind then struggle to keep up with the curriculum. Bullying in schools has been identified as a contributor to the high dropout rate at the secondary level but data on the prevalence of gendered school-based violence is scarce.

Quality of teachers

Teacher education levels are improving, but continuous professional development presents challenges. In 2019, there were 55 ECCE teachers for 676 students, 106 primary teachers for 1,687 students and 46 secondary teachers for 683 students, resulting in very low student-teacher ratios across all the islands except Funafuti. Two islands have recorded fewer than ten primary pupils per teacher (World Bank, 2020). These low ratios, which are well below the national benchmarks, often lead to teachers being responsible for multi-level classes, which is something the teachers do not currently receive training in. According to data obtained on the qualifications of teachers (see Table 83), only 48 per cent of teachers teaching in secondary schools were certified, which indicates that almost half of the secondary school teachers have no specialised training in teaching.

Concluding Remarks

The Tuvalu Education Sector Plan (TESP III), implemented in 2016, outlines a principal strategy to promote nationwide access to a relevant and modern curriculum, quality schooling and efficient and sustainable education systems in Tuvalu. Its achievements to date include increased access to pre-primary and primary education and increased primary school completion rates, increased capacity development for teachers, revised school curriculum and expansion of TVET training opportunities (World Bank, 2020).

Despite considerable investment in the education sector, there are still some overarching challenges to providing quality and inclusive education for all which need greater attention — for example, lack of ongoing training for teachers, outdated school facilities and teaching materials and a lack of data on students with disabilities (UNICEF, 2017).

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CHAPTER

10

Vanuatu:
Exploratory Study of Out-of-School Children in Vanuatu

Executive Summary

The Government of Vanuatu places a priority on school entry and enrolment. Despite this, the issue of children failing to receive or continue with formalised education is a growing concern in the country (UNICEF, 2017). Several other education-related issues such as age-appropriate entry, low progression, low completion rates, poor survival rates at primary and secondary level and higher dropout rates for boys compared to girls are also pressing concerns and need urgent attention.

The reasons for high dropout rates are the financial burden placed on parents who send their children to school, difficulties in accessing schools due to poor infrastructure, disability-related factors, teenage pregnancies and teacher preparedness, which affects the quality of teaching. In addition, overage enrolment in primary schools places huge demands on teachers who find themselves teaching various age groups in one class. As a result, teachers are tasked with the added responsibility of making appropriate modifications to their classroom and pedagogy, a task exacerbated by a shortage of qualified and trained teachers. Moreover, due to the remoteness of the islands scattered all over the archipelago, providing education services for all children is logistically challenging.

Initiatives such as curriculum reforms, increases in teacher training and professional development, fee-free grant schemes for primary education, the provision of provincial Skill Centres and rural training colleges are some examples of the ways in which the Government of Vanuatu is trying to tackle the issue of school dropouts.

Country Profile: Geography and Demographics

The Republic of Vanuatu lies in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, about 800 kilometres west of Fiji and 1,800 kilometres northeast of Australia (see Figure 24). It is an archipelago consisting of about 83 islands, 65 of which are inhabited. The capital city, and largest commercial centre, is Port-Vila, located in the southwest of Efate Island. The Indigenous people of Vanuatu, ni-Vanuatu, are predominantly Melanesian. Bislama, an English-based Melanesian pidgin, English and French are Vanuatu's three official languages. The country and its people are vulnerable to natural disasters, including cyclones, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. In early 2020, a category 5 cyclone — Tropical Cyclone Harold — affected more than 80 per cent of the population of Sanama Province; many people lost their homes. The cyclone damaged 60 per cent of the schools and 20 per cent of the healthcare facilities in the country (OCHA, 2020). Many communities in Vanuatu do not have ready access to basic infrastructure, transport and health services. The isolated location of communities compounded with a lack of resources increases the difficulty of providing high-quality education.

According to the mini census of 2016, the Republic of Vanuatu had a combined population of 272,459, consisting of 138,265 male inhabitants and 134,194 female; 204,710 people resided in rural areas and 67,749 in urban areas. There were 104,561 children below the age of 15, and a youth population, people between the ages of 15 and 29, of 70,042. There were 75,418 people between the ages of 30 and 59 years, and 16,534 aged 60 years and older. Out of the total population, 11.2 per cent of

Figure 24: Map of Vanuatu

Source: Mapsland (2021). (Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Licence)

people between the ages of 6 and 13 years were not in schools. Shefa was the most populated province out of a total of six provinces, with a total of 97,602 people at the time of the census. Almost 25 per cent of the population lives in the two main cities of Port Vila and Luganville (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2016).

Overview of the Education System in Vanuatu

Early childhood education

The official entry age in early childhood education (ECCE) centres is between 4 and 5 years (per the Early Childhood Care and Education Policy of 2017). Previously, ECCE was viewed as a separate entity from the education system in Vanuatu and its programmes were basically run by local community groups. However, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has made important reforms to improve ECCE by making specific provision for it in the *Education Act,* Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy 2007–2016, Vanuatu Education Road Map 2010–2012 and Vanuatu Education Sector Programme Plan 2013-2017 — all of which are focussed on the development of ECCE as part of their core objectives — as well as introducing a national preschool curriculum through the introduction of the Vanuatu National Curriculum for Kindergarten Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy 2007–2016.

Primary and secondary education

The *Education Act* (2014) states that primary education in Vanuatu consists of six years (Years 1 to 6), commencing at the age of 6. Secondary education consists of eight years (Years 7 to 14) and commences at the age of 12. Students sit a national examination at the end of Year 10 that separates out the best 40 per cent to enrol in senior secondary education, which is Years 11 to 13/14. Primary and secondary schools in Vanuatu are either run by the government or are government-assisted Church schools (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). Students who drop out of the school system may find a place in the Rural Training Centres (RTC), the University of the South Pacific, vocational centres or short correspondence courses if they are able to finance their education.

Technical and vocational education (TVET)

Informal education consists of a range of technical and vocational education and skills training (TVET) programmes; a network of Rural Training Centres (RTCs) managed by local communities, Churches and private bodies that operate accredited learning programmes; and other private sector training institutions for IT and Business Management (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014). The main TVET centre in Vanuatu is the Vanuatu Institute of Technology; others include the Vanuatu Maritime College, Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education, Vanuatu Institute of Technology, Vanuatu Nursing College, Australian Pacific Training College, Vanuatu Agriculture College and Vanuatu Police College.

Vanuatu Rural Development Training Centers Association (VRDTCA)

VRDTCA is a network of vocational-based schools designed for young people who have been pushed out of the formal educational system. It provides them with training in specific skills to improve the quality of life in rural areas. VRDTCA works with 40 Rural Training Centres across the six provinces in Vanuatu to promote income-generating and self-reliance opportunities for youth (Mullins, 2018).

Vanuatu has prioritised equity and inclusion in order to meet its commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4. In order to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, the *Vanuatu 2030: The People's Plan* report (Department of Strategic Policy, Planning and Aid Coordination, 2016) stipulates that every child, regardless of who they are, must be able to access the education system. The Universal Primary Education Policy ensures that children have access to free education from Years 1 to 6 and that the local vernacular is a language of instruction.

Post-secondary education

Several options are available to students to further their education once they leave secondary school. One option is to enrol in a TVET course. Under the Ministry of Education and Training, the TVET Partnership supports the operation of Provincial Skills Centres in all provinces. Local training providers and industry coaches deliver skills development training through short-term courses. The Australia-Pacific Technical College also offers vocational training through many certificate courses (Mullins, 2018).

Youth can also enrol in post-secondary colleges such as the Vanuatu Institute of Technology, Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education, Vanuatu Maritime College and Vanuatu Agricultural College or apply to one of the two universities in Vanuatu, Agence universitaire de la Francophonie and University of the South Pacific. Youth Challenge Vanuatu and Wan Smolbag, both non-government agencies, also provide vocational education and training to youth who have dropped out of schools. Private businesses such as computer schools offer training in secretarial and computer activities.

The University of the South Pacific offers second-chance programmes in the form of preliminary and foundation courses to students who are unable to complete Years 12 or 13.

Children with disabilities in Vanuatu

Globally, children and adults with disabilities are the most marginalised groups in their societies. A UNICEF report titled *Children, Women and Men with Disabilities in Vanuatu: What do the data say*? (UNICEF Pacific & Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2014) explored the prevalence of disability among children in Vanuatu and concluded that people with disabilities are likely to be among the poorest of the population, children with disabilities are more likely than their non-disabled peers to drop out of schools and adults with disabilities are likely to have less chance of securing employment outside the home.

According to the Education Sector Snapshot for Comprehensive School Safety and Education in Emergencies (Ministry of Education and Training, Vanuatu, & Save the Children, 2016), 110 students with disabilities were in schools in Vanuatu — 14 in ECCE centres, 88 in primary education and 8 in secondary education. The same report highlighted that most students with disabilities in Vanuatu drop out of school at the primary level and only a few of them are able to access secondary education.

To promote the inclusion of people with disabilities, the Republic of Vanuatu has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and subsequently established a National Disability Policy and Plan of Action 2008–2015, Mental Health Policy and Plan 2009–2015 and Inclusive Education Policy and Strategic Plan 2010–2020.

Key Education Statistics

The following tables summarise access, attendance and enrolment figures in Vanuatu's schools.

Access to education

Table 85: Access to Education in Vanuatu, 2016–2018

Indicator	2016	2017	2018
Total % of Students Attending ECCE, Primary and Secondary Schools	—	—	92%
% of Entrants in Primary Year 1	77.3%	88.8%	89.1%
Gross Intake Rate in Primary Year 1	123%	150%	154%
Net Intake Rate in Primary Year 1	45%	49%	60%
Transition Rate from ECCE to Year 1		102%	79.3%
Transition Rate from Year 6 to Year 7		78.2%	82.8%
Transition Rate from Year 10 to Year 11		64.4%	59.7%
Transition Rate from Year 12 to Year 13		63%	68.5%
Average Dropout Rate: Primary Schools			4%
Average Completion Rate: Primary Schools			96%
Average Survival Rate to Year 6			99%
Average Repetition Rate Years 1–6			24%
Average Promotion Rate Years 1–6			99%

Source: Ministry of Education and Training (2018)

School attendance

Table 86: School Attendance in Vanuatu

Region	Total			Currently Attending School			Not Attending School		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Vanuatu	266,555	134,937	131,618	73,435	38,088	35,347	193,120	96,849	96,271
Urban	66,809	33,876	32,933	18,855	9,599	9,256	47,954	24,277	23,677
Rural	199,746	101,061	98,685	54,580	28,489	26,091	145,166	72,572	72,594

Source: Vanuatu National Statistics Office (2016)

The data in the table above show that a higher proportion of boys than girls are not attending schools, although girls are very likely to drop out of school and fail to complete their education because of teenage pregnancy (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). The *Vanuatu, 2016 Post-TC Pam, Mini Census Report* suggests that in primary school, students may drop out in Year 6 because the Year 6 exam determines their entry to secondary school. The data reveal that the proportion of students not attending schools is higher in rural areas than urban areas (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2016).

Out-of-school children

In primary schools, the percentage of out-of-school children dropped from 13 per cent in 2016 to 8 per cent in 2018. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the school grant scheme that was introduced in 2010 for primary school and later expanded in 2018 for ECCE. This scheme has contributed to the significant increase in access to ECCE and primary schools throughout the country (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019).

Table 87: OOSC in Vanuatu, 2016–2018

Indicators	2016	2017	2018
Out-of-School Children in Primary School Aged 4–5 Years	56%	21%	16%
Out-of-School Children in Primary School Aged 6–11 Years	13%	8%	8%

Extracted from Ministry of Education and Training (2019)

The following graphs depict trends in out-of-school children in ECCE and primary education for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The percentage of out-of-school children in ECCE dropped from 56 per cent in 2016 to 16 per cent in 2018. In primary schools, the percentage of out-of-school children dropped from 13 per cent in 2016 to 8 per cent in 2018.

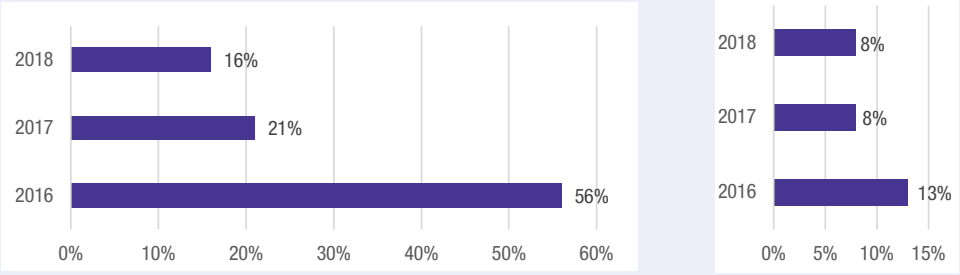

Figure 25: Trends in OOSC Rates in Vanuatu

Source: Ministry of Education and Training (2019)

Total school enrolment by school type: 2017–2019

The overall enrolment in ECCE, primary and secondary schools in 2019 was 92,644 students (Ministry of Education and Training, 2020a). From a longitudinal perspective, it can be seen that overall enrolment has increased over the past three years, possibly because of an increase in government spending. More students are able to go to school because of the government's 2010 fees-free education initiative.

Table 88: Total School Enrolment by Type in Vanuatu

School Type	2017	2018	2019
ECCE	14,921	15,661	16,445
Primary (years 1– 6)	49,005	52,789	54,820
Secondary (years 7–14)	19,231	19,983	21,379
Total	83,157	88,433	92,644

Source: Open VEMIS, 2019, adapted from Ministry of Education and Training (2020a)

School enrolment by age categories in each school type in 2019

Table 89 (below) shows enrolment rates by age, which shows the percentage of underage and overage students in schools. It can be seen that 1,244 students who enrolled in primary schools were underage in 2019 and 12,186 were overage.

Table 89: School Enrolment by Category in Vanuatu

School Type	Right Age	Underage	Overage	Total
ECCE	12,737	1,088	2,620	16,445
Primary	41,390	1,244	12,186	54,820
Junior Secondary	10,408	257	6,052	16,717
Senior Secondary	3,760	131	771	4,662
Total	68,295	2,720	21,629	92,644

Source: Open VEMIS, 2019, adapted from Ministry of Education and Training (2020a)

Table 90: Number of Schools by Type in Vanuatu

School Type	2017	2018	2019
ECCE	520	838	863
Primary School (years 1–6)	436	455	479
Secondary School (years 7–14)	93	104	111
Total	1,049	1,397	1,453

Source: Open VEMIS, 2019, extracted from Ministry of Education and Training (2020a)

Table 91: Number of Teachers by School Type in Vanuatu

School Type	2017	2018	2019
ECCE	1,033	1,306	1,314
Primary (years 1–6)	1,780	1,908	1,928
Secondary (years 7–14)	1,013	980	988
Total	3,826	4,194	4,230

Source: Open VEMIS, 2019, extracted from Ministry of Education and Training (2020a)

Student enrolment by gender

The distribution of students under each authority shows that the total enrolment has increased in the past four years. Education statistics for 2019 reveal that between 2018 and 2019 there was an increase of 7.8 per cent in ECCE enrolment, 20.31 per cent at primary level and 13.96 per cent at secondary level (Ministry of Education and Training, Vanuatu, 2020a).

Table 92: Enrolment by Gender and School Type in Vanuatu

Year		2016	2017	2018	2019
ECCE	Male	4,577	7,861 ↗	7,984 ↗	8,348 ↗
	Female	4,223	7,060 ↗	7,677 ↗	8,097 ↗
	Total	8,800	14,921 ↗	15,661 ↗	16,445 ↗
Primary (years 1–6)	Male	23,770	26,080 ↗	28,095 ↗	28,988 ↗
	Female	21,195	22,925 ↗	24,694 ↗	25,832 ↗
	Total	44,965	49,005 ↗	52,789 ↗	54,820 ↗
Secondary (years 7–14)	Male	9,161	9,483 ↗	9,804 ↗	10,427 ↗
	Female	9,247	9,748 ↗	10,179 ↗	10,952 ↗
	Total	18,408	19,231 ↗	19,983 ↗	21,379 ↗

Source: Open VEMIS, 2019, extracted from Ministry of Education and Training (2020a)

Table 93: Enrolment by School Type in Urban and Rural Areas in Vanuatu

School Type	Rural	Urban
ECCE	13,460	2,985
Primary (years 1–6)	44,394	10,426
Secondary (years 7–14)	14,307	13,411
Total	72,161	20,483

Source: Open VEMIS, 2019, extracted from Ministry of Education and Training (2020a)

Table 94: Total Enrolment by Context, Type and Gender in Vanuatu

Rural/Urban	School Type	2019		
		Male	Female	Total
Rural	ECCE	6,826	6,634	13,460
	Primary	23,561	20,833	44,394
	Secondary	7,038	7,269	14,307
	Total	37,425	34,736	72,161
Urban	ECCE	1,522	1,463	2,985
	Primary	5,427	4,999	10,426
	Secondary	3,388	3,684	7,072
	Total	10,337	10,146	20,483

Source: Open VEMIS, 2019, extracted from Ministry of Education and Training (2020a)

Enrolment rates

The *Vanuatu Barriers to Education* study (Mullins, 2018) indicated that economic hardships and reduced opportunities for parents to generate income for school fees and geographical barriers to schools may affect enrolment and performance.

Table 95: GER and GPI in Vanuatu Schools

	Year	2016	2017	2018	2019
ECCE	Male	59.70%	102.40%	104.00%	108.90%
	Female	60.00%	100.10%	108.90%	115.00%
	Total	59.80%	101.30%	106.30%	111.80%
	GPI	1.00	0.98	1.05	1.06
Primary (years 1–6)	Male	114.20%	121.80%	128.00%	129.50%
	Female	109.80%	115.50%	121.60%	124.80%
	Total	112.00%	118.80%	124.90%	127.30%
	GPI	0.96	0.95	0.95	0.96

Secondary (years 7–14)	Male	43.30%	44.30%	45.10%	44.10%
	Female	47.80%	49.50%	50.70%	50.00%
	Total	45.50%	46.80%	47.70%	47.00%
	GPI	1.1	1.12	1.12	1.13

Source: Open VEMIS, 2019, adapted from Ministry of Education and Training (2020a)

Table 96: NER and GPI in Vanuatu Schools

Year		2016	2017	2018	2019
ECCE	Male	32.80%	66.40%	75.50%	84.00%
	Female	33.80%	65.40%	80.50%	89.40%
	Total	33.30%	65.80%	77.90%	86.60%
	GPI	1.03	0.99	1.07	1.06
Primary (years 1–6)	Male	84.80%	87.60%	92.90%	96.50%
	Female	84.60%	90.80%	90.40%	95.70%
	Total	84.60%	90.40%	91.70%	96.10%
	GPI	1.00	1.04	0.97	0.99
Secondary (years 7–14)	Male	40.10%	39.90%	39.20%	40.00%
	Female	44.90%	45.60%	45.80%	46.70%
	Total	42.40%	43.20%	42.40%	43.20%
	GPI	1.12	1.15	1.17	1.17

Source: Open VEMIS, 2019, adapted from Ministry of Education and Training (2020a)

Even though enrolment figures for ECCE increased from 2016 to 2019, the proportion of children in the ECCE age category enrolled in kindergarten remains low. Although the NER for ECCE has also increased since 2016, the figures for 2019 indicate that at least 14 per cent of children aged between 3 and 5 are still not enrolled in formal ECCE.

Secondary school enrolment is significantly lower than primary school enrolment, although there was a slight increase in enrolment from 2016 to 2019. Data for the GER indicate that a significant proportion of children enrolled in secondary education fell outside the official age group of 12 to 18 in 2019 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). In terms of gender disparities, primary school enrolment rates are slightly higher for boys than girls.

However, the GER for ECCE increased from 59.8 per cent in 2016 to 111.8 per cent in 2019 (see Table 95), indicating that a proportion of students enrolled in ECCE fall outside the official age group of 3 to 5 years old. The ECCE enrolment rates for boys and girls have been fairly even since 2016, showing that there is little disparity between the two genders when it comes to ECCE enrolment.

Despite the government's ongoing efforts to improve access to education since 2015, the net enrolment rate (NER) for secondary education remains low compared to the NER for ECCE and primary education. Primary schools have the highest NER, with over 96 per cent of primary school-age children enrolled in school. In ECCE, only 86 per cent of children are attending at the correct age, an issue that will require significant attention. In secondary schools, only 43 per cent of secondary school-aged children were enrolled in 2019.

Teachers' Qualifications in Vanuatu

To be certified as a teacher in Vanuatu, one must have some form of higher education qualification such as an undergraduate or master's degree. Generally, all teachers in Vanuatu possess a teaching qualification. To improve the quality of ECCE education in Vanuatu, the government has improved teacher training for ECCE. According to the *Situation Analysis of Children in Vanuatu* report (UNICEF, 2017), diploma-level courses were due to be introduced at the Vanuatu Institute of Teachers' Education for ECCE teachers in 2018. The report states that teacher training for ECCE education needs further development.

Table 97: Teacher Certification Rates in Vanuatu

Year		2016			2017			2018		
Teacher		No. of Certified Teachers	Total Teachers	% Certified	No. of Certified Teachers	Total Teachers	% Certified	No. of Certified Teachers	Total Teachers	% Certified
ECCE	Male				28	42	67%	30	48	63%
	Female				824	991	83%	822	1,258	65%
	Total				852	1,033	82%	852	1,306	65%
Primary	Male	554	686	81%	669	770	87%	615	803	77%
	Female	679	862	79%	705	1,010	70%	790	1,105	71%
	Total	1,234	1,548	80%	1,374	1,780	77%	1,405	1,908	74%
Secondary	Male	416	433	96%	479	580	83%	521	555	94%
	Female	302	328	92%	347	433	80%	398	425	94%
	Total	718	761	94%	826	1,013	82%	919	980	94%
Total		1,952	2,309	85%	3,052	3,826	80%	3,176	4,194	76%

Source: Open VEMIS, 2018, adapted from Ministry of Education and Training (2019)

ICT Infrastructure in Vanuatu

Broadband subscriptions in Vanuatu range from 9 per cent to 30 per cent of per capita income, depending on the operator and on whether they are wireless or fixed. The high cost of Internet services in Vanuatu is due to the difficult geography of the country. However, the introduction of the submarine cable has meant that wholesale bandwidth prices have been significantly reduced, although there is scope for further reductions (Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, 2015).

The integration of technology in the educational sector is limited, as there is very little government support for the use of ICTs in schools — mainly because of budget constraints — which results in limited Internet access in schools. Because of this, there are variations in connectivity levels across rural and urban primary and secondary schools. Studies conducted over the years indicate that ICTs are seen as low priority because of unreliable Internet access, lack of electricity, lack of computers and lack of trained staff. The Government of Vanuatu is committed to increasing Internet access across the country and has adopted the Universal Access Policy (UAP) funded by the Australian government (TRBR, 2019a).

UAP is a government initiative whose objective is to expand ICTs and telecommunication services to underserved and unreached areas, which are mostly located in rural areas where access to telecommunication services is poor. The initiative was implemented by the Telecommunications Radiocommunications and Broadcasting Regulator (TRBR), which provides needed support to the service providers (Telecom Vanuatu Limited and Digicel Vanuatu) to ensure that the objectives of the policy were achieved during its implementation. The government achieved major milestones after the implementation of the project.

As part of the Universal Access Policy, the Government of Vanuatu handed out 20 Aptus devices to be used in schools so that teachers, students and parents can have access to digital resources and a library without the need for a physical library as found in the traditional schooling system. Aptus is a small mobile wireless device developed by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). It is a no-connectivity device that operates on an integrated wireless router and enables teachers and students to access digital educational materials (Government of Vanuatu, 2015).

The *Universal Access Policy (UAP) Stakeholders Tenth and Final Report on the Status of Implementation of the Government's Universal Access Policy* report revealed that under these initiatives, TRBR has completed the rollout of the Tablets for Students (TFS) programme, Internet Community Centres (ICC) initiative and Computer Laboratories and Internet Community Centre (CLICC) programmes, whereby the community is given basic skills training and the students use the technology in their learning (TRBR, 2019b). One of the challenges highlighted in the report was inadequate ICT skills among teachers, meaning they are not able to pass on the benefits of ICTs to their students. This inevitably calls for more ICT training for teachers. One of the recommendations made in the report was for the Ministry of Education to consider introducing ICT-competency-based training for teachers through distance and flexible modes.

Internet access

Internet access in Vanuatu remains a challenge, as illustrated by Table 98 (below).

Table 98: Internet Access in Vanuatu

Total Population of Vanuatu	292,680 (2018 estimates)
Individuals Using the Internet (% of population)	25.72% (2017)
Fixed Broadband Subscriptions	4,718 (2018)
Mobile Cellular Subscriptions (per 100 people)	79.863
Secure Internet Servers	105 (2019)
Secure Internet Servers (per 1 million people)	350 (2019)
Mobile Cellular Subscriptions	251,428 (2018)

Source: World Bank (n.d.)

An average mobile phone call in Vanuatu costs 27 VT (USD0.24) per minute. According to the *2018 Telecommunications Sector Report on Vanuatu*, the Interchange Cable Network 1 (ICN1) submarine cable provides Internet access and capacity for fixed and mobile networks, broadband services and large data download plans. With the innovation of new mobile technologies such as LTE and 4G+ facilitated by the UAP, there has been a reduction in the cost of mobile data; coverage and services have also been increased and improved (TRBR, 2018).

With access to the submarine cable and the availability of the 4G network, there has been a reduction in the wholesale price for Internet bandwidth, resulting in an increase in the number of fixed wireless data subscriptions, which reached 2,517 subscribers in 2017 (TRBR, 2018).

Mobile Internet services

Mobile Internet services are being used as a common means of accessing the Internet in Vanuatu now that 4G, which was launched in 2016, provides typical download speeds of up to 10 Mbits. Under the UAP, there has been an increase in mobile data subscriptions from 101,438 subscribers in 2016 to 125,366 in 2017. In 2017 the average prepaid mobile data price was 0.66 VT/MB and the average post-pay price was 4.85VT/MB.

Challenges in Education

The Government of Vanuatu has been active in ensuring that all children of compulsory school age attend school. As part of its National Sustainable Development Plan for 2016–2030, the government prioritises achieving universal education for the youth of the country. Consequently, it provides free education from ECCE to Year 8 to increase enrolment rates in primary education and reduce financial barriers to children's enrolment in primary education. According to the *Vanuatu*

Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan 2020–2030, participation in education has increased and there has been a reduction in the proportion of out-of-school children. This has been a result of the School Grant Scheme which was introduced for primary schools in 2010 and for ECCE in 2018 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2020b).

In addition, education reforms to improve the quality of primary education include the introduction of the Vanuatu Minimum Quality Standards for primary schools, a three-year diploma for trainee teachers (in 2010) and an In-Service Unit at the Vanuatu Institute for Teacher Education, which aims to develop teaching skills and offer professional development training (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

Under the government's Universal Access Policy, a number of initiatives have been introduced to improve access to telecommunication services for locations which were not previously adequately served. A significant component of this policy aims to increase access to ICT and Internet services in schools and improve digital literacy in communities.

Despite these efforts, there are still barriers to achieving quality primary and secondary education — for example, an irrelevant curriculum, lack of age-appropriate resources for overage and underage students in primary and secondary schools, high student-teacher ratios that result in low-quality teaching, lack of teachers certified in education, lack of formal teacher training opportunities, unqualified teachers working in rural and remote areas who are disadvantaged because they have limited or no access to in-service teacher training and support and limited classroom resources such as textbooks and teaching guides in all disciplines but particularly in basic education and the social sciences. Secondary schools also lack specialised facilities and equipment such as science laboratories (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

School dropout rates

According to the Ministry of Education and Training *National Education for All 2015 Review* report (2015), in rural areas dropout rates are high because children have to travel long distances to get to school, which results in excessively high transportation costs. The grant scheme does not extend to secondary-level education — although the government is said to be considering extending school grants to Year 10 — so children either delay enrolling or do not enrol at all.

Enrolment rates are also affected by the indirect costs of education, such as the cost of uniforms (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). Migration from one island to another also means that children are taken out of school, adding to the school dropout numbers.

Low enrolment in ECCE

The reasons for the low NER for ECCE, according to the Ministry of Education and Training, as cited in the *Situation Analysis of Children in Vanuatu* (UNICEF, 2017), are parents not placing enough importance on ECCE and/or being unable

to travel long distances to get their children to and from school. Furthermore, because funding for the ECCE centres comes from communities and school fees paid by parents, ECCE providers are unable to pay competitive salaries to qualified staff in order to retain them. This issue is more pronounced in rural areas, where ECCE teachers are paid in kind or through an allowance (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017). Moreover, the cost of training and the distances ECCE teachers are required to travel to access training add to the barrier of developing skilled ECCE teachers (UNICEF, 2017). There is a lack of ECCE data on children with disabilities in terms of attendance and completion rates and availability of resources per child, so further research in this area is required.

Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities and disadvantaged children are more likely than children without disabilities to drop out of school. Approximately 2.9 per cent of students in primary schools in 2015 were identified as having a disability; some were "not able to adapt themselves with the normal teaching and learning development in the classrooms," resulting in their dropping out (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). This issue requires further research and attention to ensure that all children have access to high-quality education.

Concluding Remarks

- There is a need to improve the quality of education through enhanced professional competencies of teachers, an appropriate curriculum, better-quality teaching resources and improved school facilities.
- The issue of overage children is serious and needs to be addressed. Overage children in schools are more likely to drop out, as they may feel compelled to search for employment in order to support their families. On the other hand, girls may be at greater risk because of teenage pregnancy or early marriage. The case of age-appropriate enrolment is crucial, as both age groups require different pedagogical approaches, which may impose additional challenges on teachers in already crowded classrooms.
- Physical access to schools is a barrier for children in remote villages and makes the traditional delivery of education unviable. Students in secondary schools and vocational centres located in rural areas do not have ready access to organised skills development. ICTs may provide a way to improve work and study opportunities through distance learning in rural and remote villages of Vanuatu. However, the use of ICT in schools and other educational institutions is limited. In general, only 26 per cent of the total population has Internet access. The unavailability of electricity in remote and outer islands makes it difficult to have ICT systems in place.

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Afterword

Since its inception in 1987, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) has advocated the use of open schooling to open access to education to offer a reasonable chance of success to the millions of out-of-school children and youths. Over the years, COL has developed several guidelines, case studies and research reports which have been summarised and can be found at http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/2722.

The current report is a welcome addition to both the corpus and the field, as it provides a firm research base on which to build subsequent engagement in the South Pacific region.

Open schooling has traditionally addressed the needs of children and youths who have been unable to access, or have dropped out of, the traditional school system. The closure of school campuses due to COVID-19 has created an increased demand for self-study learning resources and guidelines for teachers in how to support learning continuity at a distance or online. Countries that already had established open schools (for example, the National Institute of Open Schooling, in India,[1] the Namibian College of Open Learning,[2] the British Columbia Open School,[3] in Canada, and Te Kura,[4] in New Zealand) were able to leverage the existing resources to support strategies for addressing disrupted campus-based provision of teaching (Commonwealth of Learning, 2020). The current situation may provide important lessons for the Pacific region, which is prone to school disruptions because of tropical cyclones, volcanic activity and other natural challenges.

Open schooling can be a supplementary or complementary model of schooling that uses a range of flexible approaches, based on open, flexible and distance learning approaches, to provide structured teaching and learning opportunities. It has emerged as a viable alternative to supplement and/or complement conventional classroom-based primary and secondary education. It can be provided by standalone, independent distance education institutions, be managed by an education ministry within a specific directorate or even be part of a university. An open schooling model can address the challenges of out-of-school children and youths without having a disruptive effect on mainstream schooling. Both systems can work symbiotically and benefit from each other. There is no perfect model for open schooling; individual countries have tailored the model to match their priorities (Abrioux & Ferreira, 2009).

Reading the case studies in this report, we note not only significant progress towards achieving the goal of universal access to primary education but also a

1 https://www.nios.ac.in/
2 https://www.namcol.edu.na/
3 https://www.openschool.bc.ca/
4 https://www.tekura.school.nz/

common challenge related to addressing access to and success in secondary education. A geographically dispersed population and a limited fiscus make significant expansion of traditional bricks and mortar education provision unaffordable. Limited and costly Internet access will also hinder a fully online intervention in most countries for the immediate future. Inevitably, therefore, countries in the Pacific region will need to find some form of contextually relevant blended model of education provision to ensure universal access to schooling.

Already there are examples of open schooling, or schooling-supportive interventions, in most Pacific nations which could provide valuable insights. Some examples include:

- The Matua initiative, among others, in Fiji (see Chapter 2);
- The Kiribati Education Improvement Program (see Chapter 3);
- The Nauru Education Assistance Trust scheme (see Chapter 4);
- The Flexible Open and Distance Education division and Out-of-School Children Initiative in the Ministry of Education in Papua New Guinea (see Chapter 5);
- The Samoa School Fees Grant Scheme and Samoa Inclusive Education Demonstration Programme (see Chapter 6);
- The Open Schooling Pilot Project, among other initiatives, in the Solomon Islands;
- The Skills and Employment for Tongans project (see Chapter 8);
- The Tuvalu Education Sector plan (see Chapter 9); and
- The National Sustainable Development Plan, including the nascent open schooling initiative, of the Ministry of Education and Training in Vanuatu (see Chapter 10).

What is needed now is to use the insights provided by this research, together with the lessons learned from existing open schooling initiatives in the region, to find ways in which we can both collaboratively and nationally open the doors of learning for all — and keep them open.

We envisage that following its publication, this report will be the catalyst for an ongoing series of conversations and concerted actions aimed at achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Pacific region.

Based on prior experience, and a consideration of the key findings outlined in Chapter 1, we envisage the following kinds of conversations:

1. A regional Zoom meeting to table this report formally, discuss its key findings and recommendations and share lessons learned from interventions made to date.
2. At a country level, ministries then undertake a more detailed needs analysis to identify the area(s) in which an open schooling intervention would be most effective and a SWOT analysis to begin to identify what might be possible given constraints linked to limited existing learning facilities, limited access to motivational learning materials designed to support more independent study, teacher preparation, ICT infrastructure and the explicit and hidden costs of schooling both for relevant ministries and for potential learners and their families. This can then be the basis for a follow-up discussion

with COL. As noted by Rajasekaran and Reyes (2019), the reasons children do not access or do not succeed in schooling are complex and will need to be explicitly addressed if we are to re-engage learners with schooling opportunities. As detailed in Chapter 1, Figure 3, interventions might include, inter alia:

- Policy review to ensure that any barriers that exist regarding open schooling provision are addressed.
- Curriculum review to ensure the curriculum remains relevant to the needs and aspirations of 21st-century learners, which includes exploring a more flexible, authentic and responsive assessment system.
- Exemption from school fees, exam fees or uniform requirements.
- More inclusive and differentiated teaching and counselling support strategies to help reduce dropout rates.
- After-hours and school holiday classes for traditional learners in danger of failing or dropping out and to provide face-to-face contact support for learners studying independently at a distance through an alternative or second-chance open schooling programme.
- Improved teacher development, monitoring and support.
- More effective use of existing facilities and more innovative models for provision of education in areas where traditional bricks and mortar provision will not be viable.
- Creating coherent and flexible pathways back into schooling for youths who have dropped out for various reasons and now need access to alternative routes into further education and training.
- Use of assistive technologies in both traditional and open provision to support access and success for learners with disabilities.
- Transport subsidies and free meals to enable learners to attend remotely located bricks and mortar schools on a full-time or blended learning basis.
- Reliable and sustainable Internet infrastructure to facilitate wider access to up-to-date learning materials and other learning opportunities.

At a country level, the detailed needs analysis would likely be followed by the development of an appropriate model for an open schooling pilot, the definition of the objectives of such an intervention and the development of an appropriate monitoring and evaluation strategy to inform future decision making about whether to move from pilot to scaled provision. We assume that the primary focus would be on trying to improve net enrolment rates at the secondary level, but for some countries, it may be necessary to also address needs at the upper-primary level. Given that technology is likely to play an important role in reaching out to the most marginalised, it would probably be a good idea to bring mobile and Internet service providers into the discussion from the start to address issues of access, cost and infrastructure. Central to the model would be how to ensure ongoing support for learners without necessarily requiring them to be in the same place at the same time as their teachers (Peters et al., 2017).

3. In some countries, it may be necessary to undertake a national advocacy campaign, possibly in collaboration with one or more community-based organisations, to overcome any sociocultural or economic reservations about schooling related to gender, pregnancy, above-normal schooling age, disability or cost-benefits and address issues related to physical and psychological violence in schools including corporal punishment by teachers and bullying by peers.
4. This would probably be followed, at a country and/or regional level, by the development of guidelines for the design of appropriate curriculum-based OER, which will promote gender equality and be accessible to learners with a range of disabilities, the subsequent training of and support for the content developers and a process for the quality assurance of the content created.
5. During the content development process, it will be necessary to engage in collaborative development and implementation of training, monitoring and support programmes for managers and teachers based on the use of OER, open pedagogy principles, inclusive education practices and technology-enabled learning, including the use of assistive technologies (DeRosa & Robison, 2017; Huitt & Monetti, 2017; Mathewson, 2017).
6. It might be useful to then have additional regional meetings to discuss both the design of open schooling interventions and subsequently the lessons learned from pilots in several countries.
7. If the data indicate that the open schooling intervention should be scaled or mainstreamed in a particular country, it would be necessary to ensure that the associated activities are budgeted for in the Ministry's forward planning to ensure sustainability. It should be seen as an investment for the future in a changing world (International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, 2016; World Bank, 2018).

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WHILE OPEN SCHOOLING IS NOT A PANACEA FOR THE CHALLENGES FACED, it is certainly a model that can assist governments in the relevant countries to address most of the challenges and provide quality education for all. This study provides an excellent overview of the challenges facing the education system and the strategies already in place in the nine Pacific Island countries. As is mentioned in the report, the beauty of open schooling is that it is not a fixed model. It can be tailored to the needs and the context, and it can be both cost-effective and cost-efficient. Given all the challenges highlighted in this study, the open schooling model can be adapted in each context to suit specific country needs. An integrated approach to open schooling can build a bridge between knowledge acquisition and skills development and has the potential to reduce inequalities in access and address the needs in most countries.

FRANCES J. FERREIRA, Education Specialist: Gender, COL (formerly Education Specialist for Open Schooling and CEO of Namibian College of Open Learning)

THIS REPORT CLEARLY DOCUMENTS THE CONSIDERABLE DIVERSITY AND SPECIFIC ISSUES pertaining to education relating to out-of-school students in nine Pacific Commonwealth member states. It is important research that will provide a framework for effective targeting of support from open and flexible schooling to improve accessibility and engagement in education.

MIKE HOLLINGS, Chief Executive of Te Aho o Te Pounamu in New Zealand and COMOSA Chapter Chair for the Pacific Region

THE VARIOUS STRATEGIES DEVISED FOR OOSC ARE WELL PLANNED AND THE APPROACH IS GOOD. Accessibility is the issue everywhere, and school access is a major challenge in Papua New Guinea, like any other Pacific nation. The exploratory study of OOSC for the Papua New Guinea context and findings are relevant and need an urgent focus. Open schooling must establish partnerships with other stakeholders like TVET, Church agencies and NGOs. The Papua New Guinea national education system generates a high attrition rate with significant declines in enrolment at the transition points in Grades 8, 10 and 12. Historically, these attrition rates have been barely recaptured into the formal education system. The core mandate of open schooling is to provide an alternative pathway for students to complete their education goals at their own pace and for students who have dropped out of the formal education system to continue their education through open schooling.

To address this OOSC issue, it is time for all of us to come up with a five-year strategic plan.

ANTHONY RAYAPPAN, Principal: Flexible, Open & Distance Education, Department of Education, Papua New Guinea

THIS IS A VERY INSIGHTFUL AND BENEFICIAL REPORT. This study focussed on the Pacific region; a similar study could usefully be conducted for the Caribbean member states.

SHELDON SAMUELS, National Coordinator for Adult Training & Education Services and Employment Training & Education Services, Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports, Belize; COMOSA Chapter Chair for the Caribbean Region

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