

Polynesia: In Search of Quality Education

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Introduction

The search for 'quality education' in Pacific Island countries is becoming more and more elusive. We do not quite know what it looks like, but we have been told many times of its existence and that it is somewhere out there. We have also been told by various agencies, development partners and consultants of the many roads towards this elusive 'thing'. We have also been given significant funding over the last 40 years to aid in the search for 'quality education' in our region.

This chapter presents a picture of the current status of selected Polynesian education systems, including their strengths and challenges. It then focuses on the priority issues and concerns of each of these education systems and puts forward suggestions designed to help in attaining quality education for our region.

While it is not possible to cover all of the Polynesian countries in this chapter, I have selected three countries that collectively demonstrate the range of challenges that Polynesian states face in their search for quality education. This chapter therefore focuses on the following countries: Cook Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu. These countries are member states of The University of the South Pacific (USP) and of the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS).¹ The USP and PIFS member countries are either independent (Tonga and Tuvalu) or in free association with New Zealand (Cook Islands) and have authority over their education systems. Polynesian countries, such as Samoa (www.mesc.gov.ws), Niue (www.minedu.govt.nz), Tokelau (www.tokelau.org.nz) and others are not included in this discussion. However, all of these Polynesian states share similar challenges due mainly to their size, political history and economies of scale.

I have used the term 'Polynesia' here, in reference to a number of Pacific Island countries that share similarities in culture, language and development. These countries also share a rich history of trade, migration, warfare and alliances. These countries have also shared history in the spread of Christianity, formal education and colonialism, and in more recent history of political independence, regionalism, migration and struggle for self-sufficiency in a global climate.

These Polynesian countries also share a similarity in the history of formal education. For all of the Polynesian countries, formal education arrived with the missionaries, either with the Catholic missionary or with the Methodist missionaries in the early 1800s. With the departure of the missionaries in the early 1900s, the roles of educational providers were slowly replaced by New Zealanders and Australians serving as school principals, educational administrators and teachers. With the move for independence in the 1960s, more Polynesians took over positions in each country's education system. However, the influence of New Zealand and Australia in the education system of these countries has continued to today in the form of donor assistance and employment of consultants in aid of educational development in each of these countries (Sanga and Taufe' ulunga, 2005; Sanga et al., 2005). The influence of New Zealand and Australia in the development of the education system of these Polynesian countries is evident in the curriculum, assessment, teacher education, financing and administration of these systems.

I have used the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF) 2009–2015 as a guide to assess the current context of the selected Polynesian educational systems. The PEDF was approved by the Forum Education Ministers' Meeting (FEEdMM) in March 2009 to be the guiding framework for educational development in the region. All of the selected Polynesian countries in this study are members of the FEEdMM. The PEDF framework is grounded on two key ideas: a commitment made by Pacific countries to global instruments on educational development, the Education for All (EFA) agenda and goals, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are related to education, the United Nations Literacy Decade and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). The second key idea is the national and regional response to the specific needs and challenges in education of the Pacific region. The PEDF is also in alignment with the Pacific Plan, the region's master development plan for all sectors. The PEDF is based on a regional vision for 'quality education for all in Pacific Island countries'.

The subsequent sections of this chapter examine the current context of each education system of the Polynesian countries previously identified. This includes, in each instance, background information, current status of the education system and the challenges and priority for each country. For each country,

I illustrate their efforts to attain 'quality education' and why the search for quality education, in Polynesia at least, is really a search for relevancy in education.

Cook Islands

Background

Geographical location

The Cook Islands is located to the north west of New Zealand and to the west of French Polynesia. The Cook Islands is a group of 15 small islands spread across an exclusive economic zone of 200 nautical miles. It has a total landmass of 236.7 square kilometres. Like most Pacific islands, it is vulnerable to cyclones and hurricanes. The main island Rarotonga, of 67 square kilometres, in the southern Cook Islands, hosts the country's capital Avarua.

Political status

The Cook Islands became a British protectorate in 1888, was later transferred to New Zealand in 1900. The Cook Islands has been a self-governing parliamentary democracy in free association with New Zealand since 1965. People of the Cook Islands have automatic right to New Zealand citizenship and move freely between the two countries. The close association between the two countries has influenced development in the Cook Islands in many ways.

Economic status

The Cook Islands economy is based on tourism, pearl industry and fish exports. With limited arable land, most of the agriculture production is in the southern group. The northern islands of Manihiki and Penrhyn are the centres of the pearl production, while the southern islands of Rarotonga and Aitutaki are the centres for tourism.

Social status

The Cook Islands have an estimated population of 10,777 (July 2012). Cook Islands Maori accounts for 87 per cent of the population (2001 Census) with remaining population either part Cook Islands Maori or other. English is the official language and Maori is widely spoken. Cook Islands have a young population, with a total median age of 32.9 years and with 24 per cent of the

population between 0 and 14 years old. The country has a growth rate of -3.1 and a birth rate of 15.22 births/1,000 population (est. 2012), and a total infant mortality rate of 15.3 deaths/1,000 live births. Cook Islands population have a total life expectancy at birth of 74.9 with females expected to live longer at 77 years old (est. 2012). The country spends 4.4 per cent of its GDP on health (est. 2009) and there are 1.7 physicians/1,000 population (2004). The Cook Islands has one of the highest HDI in the region (CIA, 2013).

Educational system

Overview

Education in the Cook Islands is mainly provided by the government. There are a total of 31 educational providers, with 24 Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres, 11 primary schools and 4 secondary schools. There are also 15 area schools which provide services from ECE to secondary school under one school and one management. All schools, private and government alike, receive 100 per cent funding from the government. This also means that all schools are open to the government's review system and processes including financial audit. Although governance of public schools is under the Ministry of Education, each public school has its own stakeholder committee that oversees their strategic plans, policy and goals. Private schools are usually associated and operated by a religious organization, with religious instructions and are governed by School boards.

In 2012, the total school population was at 4,152 with a total of 270 teachers. The total budget for the education sector in 2011/2012 was \$NZD13,856,984, of which \$NZD10,091,905 was government's appropriation to the Ministry of Education, \$NZD2,090,000 was from donor funding. From this budget \$NZD1,675,079 was the total grant given to Private schools for the 2011/2012 year (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2012).

Early childhood education (ECE)

In 2012, there was a total enrolment of 482 students, which was a slight decrease from an enrolment of 512 in 2011 (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2012). However, when seen over the last 5 years, there has been a steady increase in enrolment of children at ECE level. Refer to Figure 13.1. The largest number of enrolment at ECE, as reflected in the figure, is with schools in Rarotonga, the island having the largest concentration of population.

The steady increase in enrolment at ECE has been the result of significant effort put in by the Cook Islands Ministry of Education to improve services

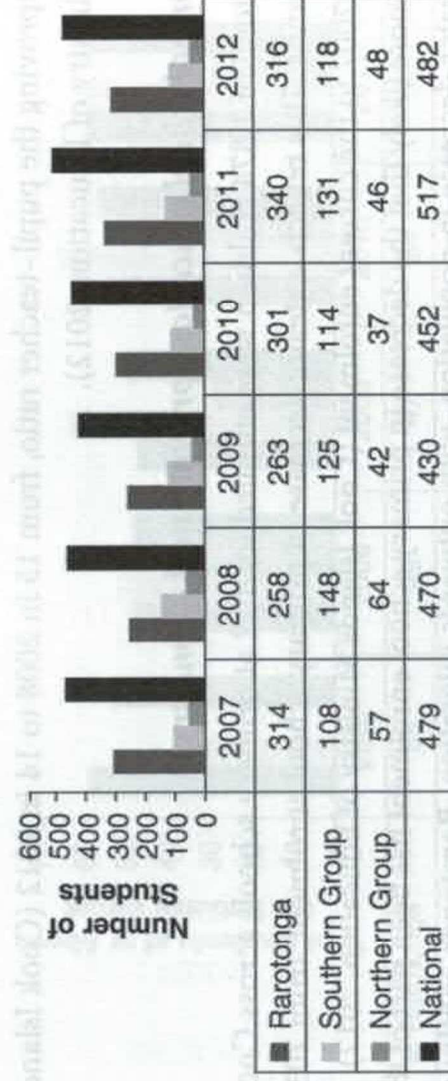


Figure 13.1 ECE enrolment 2007–2012

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Education (2012).

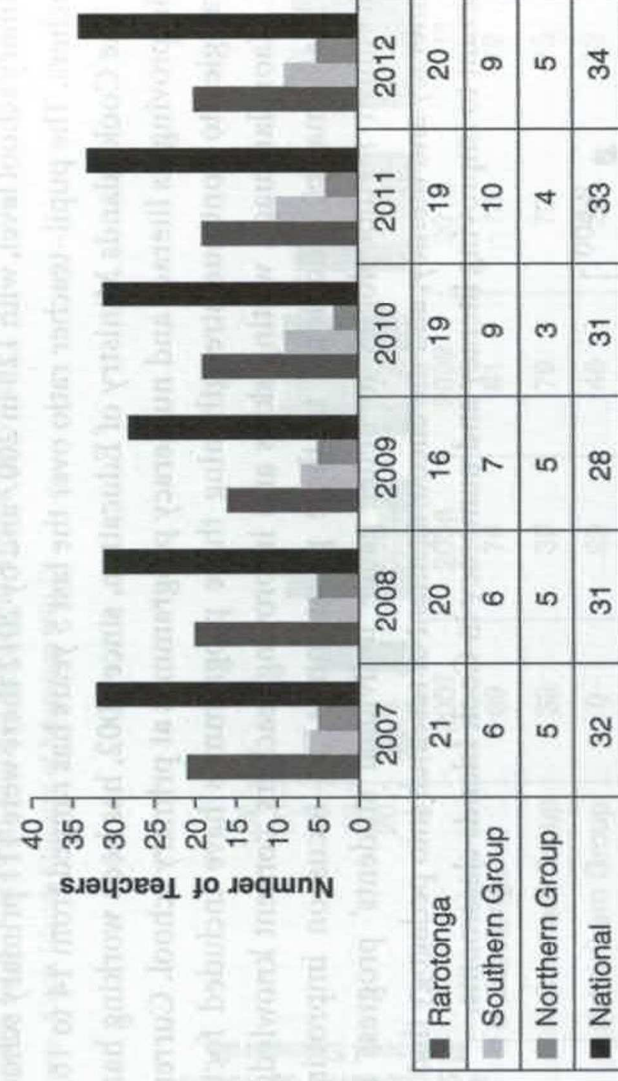


Figure 13.2 ECE teachers 2007–2012

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Education (2012).

for ECE. This has included programmes in raising awareness and encouraging parents to take leadership in the education of their children. Additional efforts have also included improvement in resourcing ECE centres and developing policy to ensure quality programmes are delivered.

The Cook Islands Ministry has recently rolled out a new curriculum for ECE with a programme to ensure that teachers at ECE level are well versed with the new curriculum and gain specific qualification in ECE. In 2012, there was total of 34 ECE teachers, again reflecting a steady increase in the Ministry's investment in ECE. Refer to Figure 13.2. In the last 5 years, the Ministry has been steadily

improving the pupil–teacher ratio, from 15 in 2008 to 14 in 2012 (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2012).

Formal school education (primary and secondary)

A total of 1,874 children were enrolled in 2012 at primary schools across Cook Islands. This reflects a steady decrease in primary school enrolment, from 2031 in 2007 to the current enrolment (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2012). It is more likely that the decrease in primary school enrolment has been part of the greater decrease in population, with outwards migration. Rarotonga continues to enrol more students at 1,233 for 2012, followed by 445 enrolment for the southern group and 197 for the northern group. Refer to Figure 13.3.

Similarly there has also been a steady decrease in the number of teachers at primary school level, with 125 in 2007 and by 2012 there were 111 primary school teachers. The pupil–teacher ratio over the last 5 years has ranged from 14 to 16.

The Cook Islands Ministry of Education, since 2002, has been working hard at improving its literacy and numeracy programmes at primary school. Current strategies to continue strengthening these programmes have included focus on Maori language, writing skills and improving teachers' content knowledge of Mathematics. Additional to these programmes are focus on improving assessment methodologies to better gauge individual students' progress in numeracy and literacy; and the encouragement of research into pedagogy that is relevant to improving literacy and numeracy in Cook Islands classrooms.

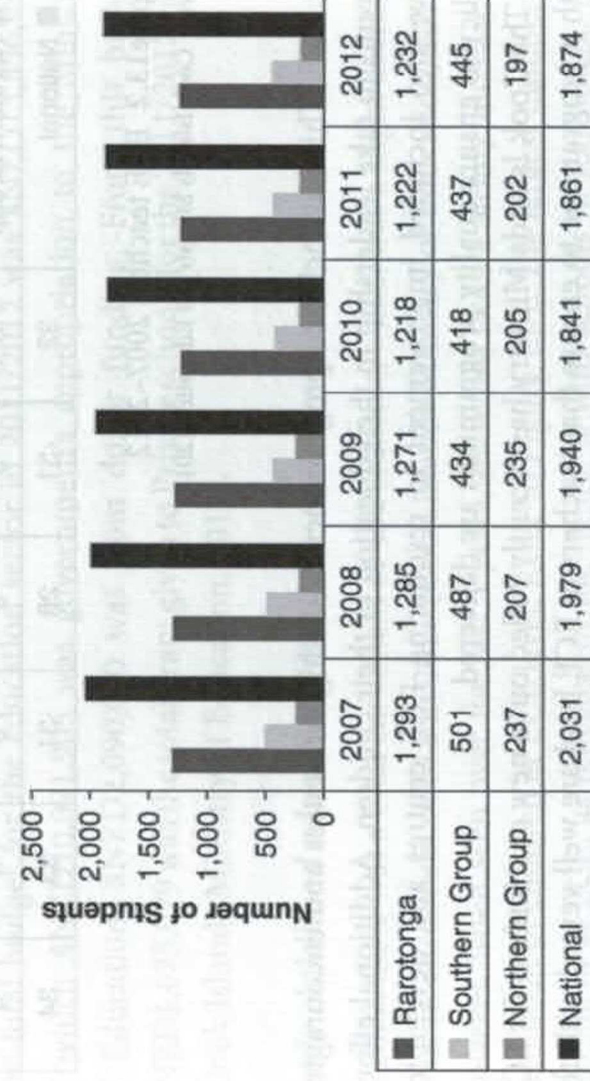


Figure 13.3 Primary school enrolment by region 2007–2012

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Education (2012).

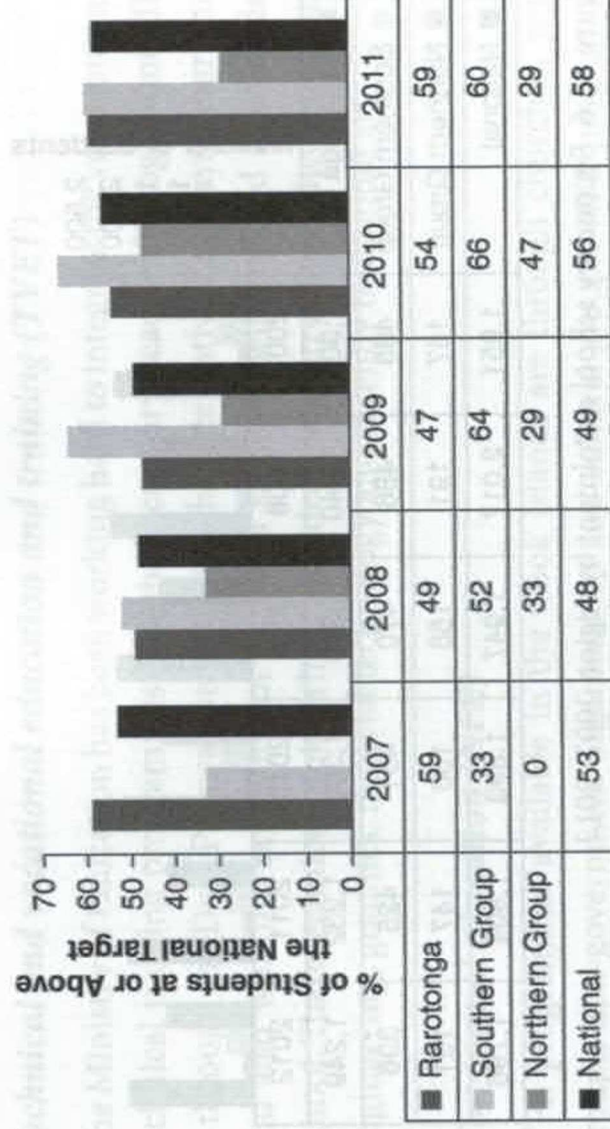


Figure 13.4 National Maori Literacy at Year 4 2007–2011

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Education (2012).

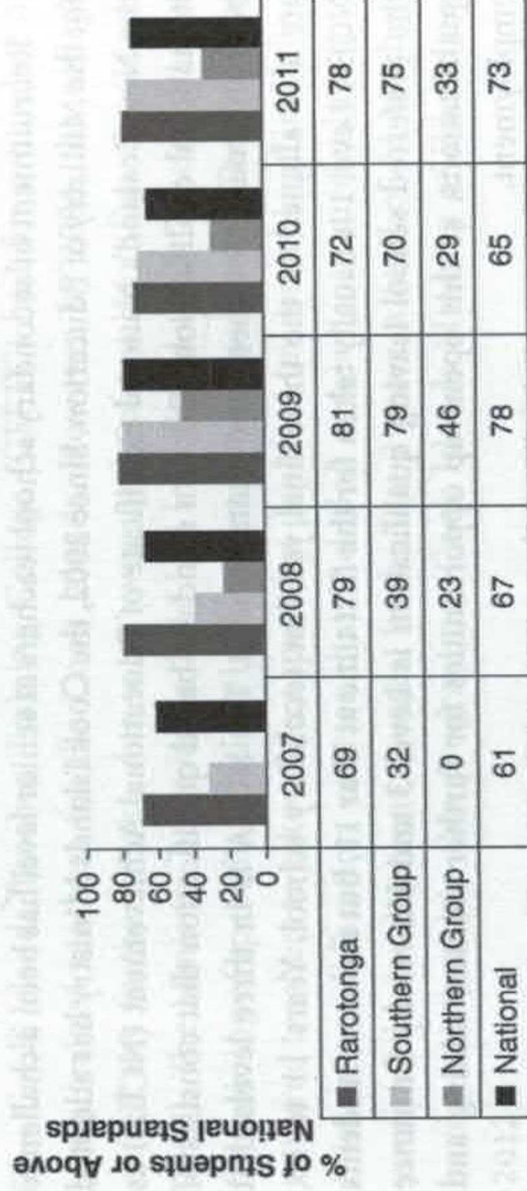


Figure 13.5 National English Literacy at Year 4 2007–2011

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Education (2012).

Recent data shows progress towards achieving the Ministry's goals for improving literacy and the numeracy rates for primary school children in the Cook Islands. Refer to Figures 13.4 and 13.5.

The total enrolment for secondary school in 2012 was 1,796 students, reflecting a steady decrease in the enrolment number for secondary school from 1,951 in 2007 to the current enrolment (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2012). Refer to Figure 13.6. This trend is also evident in the decrease in the number of teachers at secondary school, which in 2007 were 133 teachers to 2012 with a

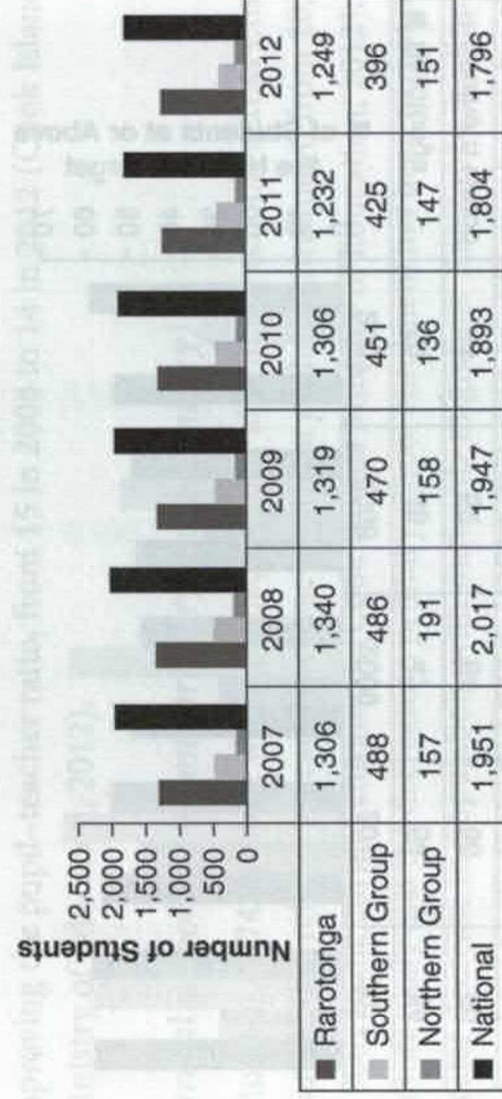


Figure 13.6 Secondary school enrolment by region 2007–2012

Source: Cook Islands Ministry of Education (2012).

total of 119 secondary school teachers. This has meant that the pupil–teacher ratio has averaged at 14 over the last 5 years.

Recruitment of secondary school teachers at senior level has been a challenge for the Ministry of Education. Since 2002, the Cook Islands Ministry has adopted the New Zealand’s National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) as its national qualification. This is a standard-based qualification that consists of both internal assessment and examinations. The NCEA is in three levels that are also aligned to the three final years at secondary school, Years 11 to 13. NCEA Level 1 is usually taken for the first time at Year 11, but for most students the preferred school leaving qualification is Level 3 and University Entrance qualifications, as this opens up opportunities for further studies/training and employment.

The Cook Islands Ministry has put in significant effort to expand the number of subjects/courses being offered at secondary school, to ensure that students have increased access to a range of choices in both academic subjects and vocational and technical subjects. The Ministry has focused its current strategies for secondary school on expanding scope of subjects being offered, expanding Dual Pathways programmes (for both academic and vocational training) and for Alternative Pathways for students looking for non-traditional school courses. The Ministry has also been working on expanding and improving its services to the remote islands of the North through the development of a number of online learning courses. However, there are growing concerns with rate of retention at Year 12 and Year 13.

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

The Ministry of Education has been working hard to integrate the vocational and technical training programmes into the secondary academic programme. This is through the Dual Pathway programme, the Alternative Pathways programme and also with the expansion of technical subjects being offered at secondary school. These technical subjects have included: carpentry, hospitality, automotive engineering, graphics, material technology and recently traditional art.

Non-formal education (NFE)

NFE programmes available in the Cook Islands are through churches, youth groups, non-government organizations and cultural groups. NFE programmes range from religious instructions, to music, dance, drama and handicraft including carving and art.

Teacher development

The Cook Islands Teacher Training College (CITTC) had for a number of years trained teachers for the Cook Islands. However, by 2006, the college closed any further intake, due to an oversupply of teachers (Fua and Sanga, 2007). The Ministry, however, in 2011 had introduced a Fast Track Initiative for training of specialist teachers in the secondary school sector. The initiative required teachers to take subject specialist papers at university level including Ministry of Education courses that included assessment, curriculum and youth/child development courses. In the last 2 years, a total of 21 teachers have participated in this programme (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2012).

Priority issues

Cook Islands education system has done well in progressing towards the MDGs. By 1999, the country had achieved universal basic primary education and recorded a high adult literacy rate of 93 per cent (Fua and Sanga, 2007). Similarly, they have done well in achieving the strategic goals of the PEDF, particularly in ECE, primary school education, integrating TVET into the secondary school curriculum and investment in teacher professional development.

However, there are several priority areas that Cook Islands continues to find challenging in continuing the country's educational development.

Relevant curriculum

The close association with New Zealand has brought benefits as well as challenges for the Cook Islands. In early 1991, Sir Geoffrey Henry (prime minister of Cook Islands at the time) addressed a gathering in Rarotonga hosted by UNESCO on Education, culture and identity reiterated the same issue of a responsive education system. He stated 'I am aware not of balance but of imbalance. I feel that, in this community, education has yet to be relevant to whom we are'. He went on further to state that 'any hope of recovering what has been lost, any chance of attaining greater balance, surely depends on a greater commitment by everyone, parents, children, politicians and educators' (Teasdale and Teasdale, 1992: p. 13).

A decade later, the Ministry of Education Cook Islands continues to search for this balance in an effort to meet the educational needs of the country and at the same time meet New Zealand standards for quality education. The undertaking to ensure relevancy in the education system is most evident at ECE and Primary School level, with a strong emphasis on parental involvement, strong focus on Maori language and culture, long-term commitment to progressing literacy (in both English and Maori) and in numeracy. These efforts are certainly strengths of the current education system. The effort to meet New Zealand standards for quality education is most obvious at senior secondary school level, with the return to using the NCEA as the graduating qualification from high school. This has presented several challenges, particularly the increasing retention rate for Year 12 and Year 13. With NCEA, there is also the need for an increased number of specialist teachers at secondary school level. The Ministry, at its best, has set up several strategies in an effort to deal with these demands including the Fast Track Initiative for specialist secondary school teachers and widening the range of subjects available through the Dual pathway as well as through the Alternative pathway programme.

Education for sustainable development (ESD)

Although Cook Islands enjoy one of the higher levels of HDI in the region, it faces a similar challenge to other Polynesian countries, namely that of a decreasing population due to outward migration and negative growth rate. With easy access to New Zealand, there are now more Cook Islanders living in New Zealand than in the Cook Islands. In the last decade, resident population for Cook Islands are slowly decreasing so that the 2001 census recorded a population of 18,000 but by 2012 it was estimated at 10,777. This is also reflected in the decreasing enrolment

rate at primary and at secondary school level. The decreasing population and the consequent decrease in the school population have several implications for financing education and in supplying teachers for remote schools. This has meant more classes in the outer islands offering multi-grade classes and in some cases the close down of schools.

The increasing number in outward migration has also meant that younger people of working age are leaving the Cook Islands. Thus the challenge for the Ministry is in offering an education system that meets the labour market of the country or the labour market demands of New Zealand, with the reality being that most of their school graduates will leave the country. The challenges faced by the education system of the Cook Islands in striving for relevancy and ESD are shared with other Polynesian countries.

Tonga

Background

Geographical location

Tonga is an archipelago consisting of 169 islands, 36 of which are inhabited. These islands are divided into three regions, with Vavá'u, Niuafóu and Niuatoputapu to the north, Ha'apai islands in the central region and the southern region consists of 'Eua and Tongatapu. The capital of Tonga, Nuku'alofa is located on the southern island of Tongatapu. Tonga is located to the east of Fiji and north east of New Zealand.

Political status

Tonga is an independent constitutional monarchy, and the only remaining kingdom in the Pacific, currently headed by His Majesty King Tupou VI. Tonga government is headed by a prime minister, who is appointed by the King upon recommendation from the Parliament. Tonga has a unicameral parliament with House of Commons and House of Lords. Tonga's constitution has been in place since 1875, making it the third oldest constitution in the world.

Economic status

Tonga's economy depends on agriculture, fisheries and to a lesser extent on tourism. The economy has been suffering stagnant growth over the last 10 years. Foreign aid and remittances from Tongans living overseas have helped prop up

the country's economy. The latest statistics show Tonga's Real GDP Growth at 4.7 per cent (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2012).

Social status

As a kingdom, Tongan society is still culturally ranked according to commoners, nobility and monarch. With modern economy, education and politics, a secondary classification cuts across the traditional ranking system, that in the last 30 years an emerging middle class has grown and with an elite middle class group being more and more evident in the early twenty-first century. The latest statistics show that Tonga has a population of 103,036 (2011 census) (Tonga Department of Statistics, 2012).

Education system

Overview

Education in Tonga is free and compulsory for ages 6 to 14 years old. Tonga Ministry of Education legally oversees all education systems in the country. However, provision for education at ECE, primary, secondary and tertiary are shared with the major church groups in the country. All ECE centres are privately owned, either by church groups or communities. Government provides 89 per cent of the primary schools, while church/private-owned educational systems operate 76 per cent of the secondary schools and 60 per cent of tertiary institutes are operated by the government (Tonga Ministry of Education, 2011). The government, with funding support from New Zealand and Australia, provides an additional school grant to each school, regardless whether it is private or government. All private educational systems are operated by their own governance systems and structures. Government schools are operated by the Tonga Ministry of Education.

ECE

ECE in Tonga is mainly operated by church and community groups. The growing interest in ECE is quite recent and it has been driven largely by private groups. At present, a Diploma in ECE is offered out of the Tonga Institute of Education. The USP through its Tonga campus also offers a Certificate in ECE. In the Ministry of Education's current policy framework, the ECE is featured as one of the key strategic goals of the Ministry. The Tonga Education Act is currently under review, and the amendments to the Act will include the expansion of the compulsory school age from age 4 to 18. With this new legal provision, it is

Table 13.1 ECE centres, school roll and number of teachers by major district as of 30 September 2011

Island	ECE centres		Pupils' roll			Teachers		Pupil/teacher (P/T) ratio	
	Number	%	F	M	Total	Number	%		
Tongatapu	40	56	566	693	1,259	112	70.57	64.37	1:11
'Eua	8	11	70	50	120	20	6.73	11.49	1:6
Ha'apai	6	8	45	56	101	12	5.66	6.90	1:8
Vava'u	13	18	120	113	233	23	13.06	13.22	1:10
Niuaas	4	6	30	41	71	7	3.98	4.02	1:10
Total	71	100	831	953	1,784	174	100.00	100.00	

Source: Tonga Ministry of Education (2011).

likely that the interest and support for ECE will continue to grow in the future. Table 13.1 shows the latest enrolment figures for ECE in Tonga.

Formal school education (primary/secondary)

Primary education in Tonga is from Class 1 to Class 6 (Year 1 – Year 6). The school entry age is normally 6 years. There is a secondary school entrance examination at the end of Class 6 of which all students sit a national exam in Mathematics, Science, Tongan Language and English. Total marks for each child determines the secondary school that the student will be accepted to enter. There continues to be a strong competition for students to gain high marks so that they can enter the better resourced government secondary schools. Unfortunately, the secondary school entrance examination and the competition for high marks has meant a large pool of student retention exists at the end of Class 6. This means that students who fail to gain the marks to enter their school of choice retake the entire Class 6 year again. This consequently impacts on resourcing teachers at this level and on the quality of teaching at this level. The Ministry in its strategic plan aims to phase out the Class 6 exam in the near future, extend the primary school years to include additional 2 years and with the possibility of a secondary school entrance exam at Class 7/Form 2.

The access rate to primary education is 100 per cent; this has come as a result of the government's long-standing policy on ensuring that no child shall have to walk more than 2 miles to a primary school. A total primary school enrolment of 17,033 students was recorded in 2011. Table 13.2 shows the latest enrolment figures for primary school students in Tonga, for 2011.

Table 13.2 All primary school enrolments by gender as of 30 September 2011

Age	Class 1		Class 2		Class 3		Class 4		Class 5		Class 6		IE		Total	Grand Total
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M		
4	9	11	8										9	11	20	
5	535	563	435	13	8	9							548	571	1,119	
6	764	867	435	809	418	389	9	11					2	1,210	1,337	2,547
7	57	69	809	916	418	389	9	11					2	1,295	1,386	2,681
8			47	77	847	896	87	70	16	1	1	1	1	1,302	1,398	2,700
9			70	87	727	886	382	367	331	342	339	339	4	1,196	1,357	2,553
10			73	114	765	892	79	137	331	342	339	339	1	1,170	1,349	2,519
11					913	925	137	925	913	925	224	224	1	922	1,062	2,054
12					24	51	24	51	24	51	24	24	1	225	343	568
13					1		1		1		1	1	1	24	51	75
14													0	1	1	1
16													1	0	1	1
Not stated	20	21	9	13	21	19	15	25	5	16	10	21	80	115	195	
Total	1,385	1,531	1,313	1,473	1,364	1,400	1,221	1,447	1,241	1,425	1,518	1,694	9	12	8,051	17,033
Grand total	2,916		2,786		2,764		2,668		2,666		3,212		21			

Source: Tonga Ministry of Education (2011).

Table 13.3 Number of primary school teachers since 2007 by controlling authority

Year	Education system	Male	Female	Total	% Female	% Total
2007	Government	180	398	578	68.8	86.9
	Non-government	14	73	87	83.9	13.1
	Total	194	471	665	70.83	100
2008	Government	184	397	581	68.3	87.37
	Non-government	17	67	84	79.76	12.63
	Total	201	464	665	69.77	100
2009	Government	182	394	576	68.4	85
	Non-government	25	79	104	76	15
	Total	207	473	680	69.56	100
2010	Government	173	403	576	69.97	85.08
	Non-government	20	81	101	80.2	14.92
	Total	193	484	677	71.49	100
2011	Government	173	431	604	71.36	85.56
	Non-government	16	86	102	84.31	14.44
	Total	189	517	706	73.23	100

Source: Tonga Ministry of Education (2011).

Table 13.3 shows the latest figures for primary school teachers, showing a high number of female teachers at primary school level, reflecting a similar trend observed elsewhere in the region. Table 13.4 shows 129 primary schools spread across the archipelago; there is a school on almost every village and every island. Government-owned primary schools are provided with teachers but with limited teaching and learning resources. Although all government-operated primary schools are free from paying fees, each community plays a significant role in the development of their village schools. Parents are major local donors in giving financial aid for renovations, building of fences and supplying additional teaching materials for the children. The Tonga Education support programme provides school grants to all primary schools for renovations and purchase of school supplies. Nevertheless, the involvement and the financial contributions from parents continue.

In 2012, a new primary school curriculum was rolled out by the Ministry of Education for Class 1 to Form 2 at secondary school. Two key features of the new curriculum focus on strengthening Tongan culture and early access to creative technology. Other features of the curriculum include strengthening of sports and health. The new curriculum also marks a shift in thinking towards a more student-centred learning and an outcome-based approach.

Secondary education in Tonga is from Form 1 to Form 7 (or Year 7 to Year 13). Students normally enter secondary school at the age of 13 and if they do

Table 13.4 Number of primary schools in Tonga by managing authority and by district as of 30 September 2011

District	Controlling authority							Total
	Government	FWS	SDA	TOK	LAFALAPA	BAHA'I	ACT	
Tongatapu	51	6	2	2	1	1	1	64
'Eua	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Ha'apai	19	2	0	1	0	0	0	22
Vava'u	31	0	0	1	0	0	0	32
Niuaotupapu	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Niuafo'ou	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	112	8	2	4	1	1	1	129

Source: Tonga Ministry of Education (2011).

Table 13.5 Number of schools, enrolments, and teachers in post at government and church secondary schools, 2010/2011

	Schools			Enrolment			Teachers		
	High	Middle	Total	High	Middle	Total	High	Middle	Total
Government	8	7	15	4,137	1,032	5,169	250	43	293
Church	24	16	40	8,572	1,097	9,669	624	69	693
Total	32	23	55	12,709	2,129	14,838	874	112	986

Source: Tonga Ministry of Education (2011).

remain until Form 7, they normally leave secondary school by the age of 18. Latest statistical records show that in 2011 there were a total of 14,575 students who were enrolled in secondary school in Tonga. Table 13.5 presents the total number of secondary schools, including middle schools, the total number of enrolment and the number of teachers working in the secondary school sector. It is worth noting that church systems operate 40 schools out of 55 secondary schools in Tonga, with a total enrolment number of students at church schools at 9,669 or 53 per cent of the student population (Tonga Ministry of Education, 2011). Teacher data is for 2010.

There are three external exams in secondary school: the Tonga School Certificate at Form 5, the Tonga Form 6 Examination and the Tonga National Form 7 Certificate at the final year. In 2012, the Ministry of Education introduced the Tonga Form 6 Certificate and National Form 7 Certificate, to replace the regional Pacific Secondary School Certificate and the Form 7 Certificate normally offered by the regional South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA). The Ministry of Education has plans to phase out the Form 6 exam at secondary

The National Form 7 Certificate allows the student to enter university and other tertiary institutes, while the Form 5 and Form 6 certificates can allow students to enter most vocational training institutes. Similar to Primary school, there is an increased retention number at Form 5 and the enrolment number decreases as students' progress towards Form 7.

At present, the secondary school (Form 3–Form 5) is under review with the expectation that the new curriculum will roll out within the next 2 to 3 years. The current secondary school curriculum continues to be heavily in favour of academic subjects, such as English, Geography, Accounting and Science with minimal attention to technical, cultural and sports curriculum. The teaching approach also continues to be teacher-driven, mainly theoretical ideas and with heavy emphasis on examinations.

TVET

Through funding from New Zealand and Australia, there has been significant support given to the promotion of TVET. The first national TVET policy was launched in early 2013 to govern provision of this curriculum. Although Tonga's education system had encouraged vocational subjects, such as industrial arts and home economics in secondary school, it had suffered neglect in the previous years as increasing emphasis was given to academic subjects. With the current support for TVET and the increasing recognition that not all students wish to pursue academic oriented careers, the Ministry of Education is working hard to strengthen pathways towards greater participation in technical and vocational subjects. It does not help when most parents still push their children towards more academic subjects in the desire to pursue white-collar jobs.

TVET is now introduced as subjects in most church schools at Form 3 and Form 4, providing an alternative pathway for students to enter tertiary TVET institutes after high school. With an increasing number of TVET providers in Tonga, there are now more choices for students to pursue a range of courses, including maritime, agriculture, engineering, hospitality and fashion and design subjects.

NFE

NFE in Tonga is mainly provided by non-government organizations and church groups, usually on an ad hoc basis, depending on demand and funding support. The most traditional of the NFE is found in the churches, with Sunday schools and religious instructions for church members. Other forms of NFE evident at

community level generally focus on the passing of traditional knowledge and skills in areas ranging from fishing, agriculture, handicrafts, weaving, cooking, traditional performing arts, music and traditional responsibilities for Tongan customary rituals.

Teacher development

Tonga Institute of Education, the government owned teacher's training college, has been training Tonga's teachers since the 1940s. Other teacher training providers, such as the church-owned Tupou Tertiary Institute, offer Diploma in Education and also USP through its Tonga Campus offer teacher education with certifications ranging from Diploma in Education to Master of Education and Master of Arts in Education.

The Tonga Institute of Education has recently been reviewed and is currently working on redeveloping its programme for 2015. The Institute offers a Diploma in Education for both primary and secondary teaching, Diploma in ECE and more recently Certificate in Teaching for untrained teachers and Postgraduate certificate in teaching for teachers with a degree but with no teaching qualification. The Ministry of Education plans to register all teachers; both government and private teachers, by 2015 and the minimal qualification for registration will be the Certificate in Teaching. There remain over 200 untrained teachers in Tonga who are mainly from the church and private education systems. The Certificate in Teaching is intended to process through the remaining untrained teachers in Tonga to reach the Ministry's target of full teacher registration by 2015.

Priority issues

Tonga has a long history of demonstrating its commitment to education, both at primary school and secondary school level. It has also enjoyed a very high literacy level in the past. However, in the last 10 years the performance of the Tonga education system has suffered series of setbacks as result of political changes in leadership and the impact of the national financial crisis.

Relevant curriculum

Although Tonga has been one of the few countries in the region who pioneered the introduction of Tongan studies in schools in the 1980s, its education systems continue to push for greater recognition of the Tongan language and culture. The recent review of the curriculum for primary school has seen the separation

of Tongan language from Tongan subject, thus creating a second subject for teaching Tongan studies. It is yet to be seen whether the new curriculum for the secondary school will continue this trend. Although the creation of two subjects in the Tongan studies area is a step forward, much work remains to ensure that Tongan culture and language are taught across the curriculum rather than in these specific subjects.

The issue of relevancy of the curriculum to Tongan students remains a significant concern for educational development in Tonga. One of the most strategic approaches that can begin to resolve this issue is the offering of Tongan language and culture across the curriculum. It is only through a much more relevant curriculum, where Tongan students can recognize their world that they can begin to truly engage in learning, and to critique and apply the knowledge they have learned. The high retention rate at Class 6 and at senior secondary school, plus the number of students that are pushed out of the system at senior secondary level, all attest to the irrelevancy of the curriculum and the struggle to make sense of knowledge system are beyond their everyday lives.

ESD

For Tonga, the issue of relevant curriculum is directly link to the issue of ESD. For the last 10 years, Tonga has been struggling to raise its economic performance. Several political events, including a civil strike in 2005 that resulted in government raising the salary of civil servants against a weak economy; the riot of 2006 that destroyed a significant number of businesses in the capital of Nuku'alofa and the reduction in remittances from overseas Tongans due to the current global crises, have all contributed to a struggling economy. Tonga imports over 50 per cent of goods with export consisting mainly of agriculture products, fisheries and traditional handicrafts. Local manufacturing is limited and despite heavy investment in tourism, it has not really taken off like Cook Islands or Fiji. Tongans have always prided themselves in a good education and its people, as it continues to send rugby players, fruit pickers and working professionals overseas. It is remittances from these Tongans that help the local economy stay afloat.

The average Tongan continues to live a semi-subsistence livelihood, living off the land and from the ocean. However, impacts of climate change are already evident in certain small low lying islands in the Ha'apai group and in Vava'u and it has affected crops and catch from the ocean. Although the average Tongan continues to live a semi-subsistence livelihood, the skills needed to survive in

these conditions continue to be lacking in the formal schooling system. The belief that academic and white-collared jobs are more desirable than farm work or fishing or traditional handicraft still remains steep in most parents' and teachers' thinking, thus Ministry's efforts to promote TVET subjects and Tongan language and culture are still met with resistance.

Most people in the farming, fishing and handicraft industry learn their trade from their parents and from their community through NFE processes, not through the formal education system. Although the formal education system focuses on subjects like Economics, Accounting, Computer and other formal subjects, after 12 years of schooling the average Tongan youth still struggle to find a formal employment. There are a high number of students who graduate from high school and are not able to either find a job or earn a livelihood for themselves. As the curriculum favours academic subjects and teaching methodologies remain abstract, students finish from high school with high aspirations of getting a white-collared job in a stagnant economy, simply struggle to find paid employment. This is compounded by the fact that students upon completing formal education lack the practical skills to earn neither a livelihood from traditional farming and fishing nor the entrepreneurship to create a livelihood for themselves using available natural resources of the country.

The Tongan education system continues its work towards an education system that will enable Tongans to live sustainably on their islands.

Tuvalu

Background

Geographical location

Tuvalu is an archipelago of six atolls and three coral islands with a total land size of 26 square kilometres, making it one of the fourth smallest country in the world. Southern Tuvalu is made up of Funafuti, Nukulaelae and Niulakita, and in the central region are islands of Nui, Nukufetau and Vaitupu. Northern Tuvalu is made up of the islands of Niutao, Nanumea and Nanumaga. Tuvalu is located north of Fiji and south of Kiribati.

Political status

Tuvalu gained independence in 1978 from the United Kingdom and is a parliamentary democracy under constitutional monarchy. The head of

government is the prime minister, who is selected by members of a unicameral parliament. There are no formal parties, and elections are still closely linked to family ties and kinship groupings. Local governance is based on traditional structures of chiefs and family links. Tuvaluan society is fairly egalitarian, with a strong culture and democratic principles. Each island is governed by local governance council consisting of chiefs and elders.

Economic status

Tuvalu's main source of revenue is through the fishing and dotTV licences and interest from the Tuvalu Trust Fund and the Falekaupule Trust Fund. Tuvaluan seafarers are also internationally recognized for their skills and their remittances also contribute to the economy of the country. For most families in Tuvalu, their main income is from formal employment, fishing, agriculture and handicraft.

Social status

The latest census count, in 2002, showed that Tuvalu's population was at 9,359 with current estimated population now residing in Tuvalu at 11,000 (2012). Tuvalu has a significantly young population with 36 per cent of the total population younger than 15 years old. The 2002 census showed an annual growth rate of 0.5 per cent. The Tuvaluan population is spread across 8 inhabited islands, with at least 3,962 people living on the main island of Funafuti in 2002.

Education system

Overview

The Department of Education is responsible for ECCE, TVET, NFE, Primary and Secondary Education, Junior Secondary School and curriculum and assessment. The Education Act of 2008 and 1977 governs education in Tuvalu and outlines that parents are responsible for ensuring that their child is at school. Education in Tuvalu is free and compulsory from ages 6 to 15 years old. In Tuvalu, there are 18 ECE centres, 9 primary schools and 2 secondary schools. There are ECE centres and primary schools on each of the eight inhabited islands, with one government-owned secondary school on Vaitupu and one private secondary school on Funafuti.

Although government contributes more than one-quarter of its budget to education (26% in 2011), the spread of a relatively small population over a number of small islands makes financing education in Tuvalu very costly.

The government's contribution to the education system is mainly towards paying teachers' salaries, with minimal funds for operations, maintenance, procurement of furniture and teaching resources. Local island governance systems and parents teachers associations play significant role in supplementing the cost of primary education on each island.

ECE

Provisions of ECE in Tuvalu are under the Tuvalu National Pre-School Council, and are managed by communities, non-government organizations and private providers. ECE is not compulsory in Tuvalu and has yet to come formally under the Department of Education. However, the government does provide funding support for infrastructure, resources and professional development for teachers. The 2002 census showed that 90 per cent of children were enrolled in ECE. ECE in Tuvalu can take in children from ages 3 to 6 years old.

There is no formal national curriculum framework for ECE in Tuvalu and as a result each ECE centre provides their own curriculum programme and determines their own regulations and activities. There has been a 59 per cent increase in the number of qualified teachers for ECE in Tuvalu, an increase from 27 in 2007 to 43 in 2011 (UNICEF, 2011).

Formal school education (primary/secondary)

Primary education in Tuvalu is compulsory and it is offered from Class 1–6 and Form 1–2. There are eight government primary schools located on each of the islands with an additional private primary school on Funafuti, operated by the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Latest statistics from 2010 show an enrolment of 1918 students (UNICEF 2011). The 2002 census showed a 99.9 per cent of children of 6–13 years old attending school.

The Tuvalu Department of Education recently introduced a national secondary school entrance examination at Form 2, which unfortunately has resulted in high retention rate for students at this level. Although there are only two secondary schools in Tuvalu, there is a perceived difference in the quality of the two schools, in favour of the government-owned secondary school. Normal practice is that students will continue to retake the exam until they qualify to enter secondary school, or reach the school leaving age and exit from the education system. Current work programme of the Tuvalu Department of Education includes investigation into the problem of student retention at this level.

Secondary education in Tuvalu is compulsory at lower secondary (ages 14–15) and voluntary for upper secondary (ages 16–17). The private secondary school, Fetuvalu High School, offers the Cambridge curriculum. The government-owned secondary school Motufoua offers a combination of curriculum, borrowing from the Fiji Junior Certificate Program for Year 10, Tuvalu School Certificate for Year 11 and the South Pacific Board of Educational Assessment for Year 12. As evident in other Pacific countries with a similar array of curriculum and exams at senior secondary level, the enrolment numbers drop as students progress up to Year 12. Census from 2002 showed a significant decline in enrolment starting at age 14 and this is most evident among boys. The census for 2002 showed that by 15 years old only 88 per cent of girls are still at school compared to 67 per cent of boys. This further declines by 16 years old, as 27 per cent of boys and 41 per cent of girls were still in school. However, this trend levels off by the time the remaining students reach 19 years old, as a higher number of boys complete secondary school (37%) compared to girls (33%). The census also showed that more boys continue on to complete tertiary education. It is highly likely that with access to the Tuvalu Maritime Training Institute, boys have a better chance of entering tertiary education than girls. Tuvalu Maritime Training Institute normally enrolls only boys. There are limited options for girls for further tertiary studies in Tuvalu.

TVET

There are several training providers in Tuvalu that offer skills training including Motufoua secondary school through the Fiji Junior Certificate, the Tuvalu Maritime Training Institutes, the Department of Public Works section for training, private and non-government training centres.

There is an absence of a national TVET policy framework to organize all the various TVET training providers and programmes.

NFE

NFE in Tuvalu is provided by a range of private and non-government organizations, including the USP Tuvalu campus, Tuvalu Association of NGOs, Tuvalu Overseas Seamens Unions and private providers. There is an absence of a national coordination mechanism to bring these trainings under a more structured system, as a result most NFE programmes are offered ad hoc and there is little mechanism to assess quality of each programme delivered.

Teacher development

The absence of a teacher training institute for Tuvalu presents several challenges, mainly the limitation in providing structured professional development for teachers, the upgrading of qualified teachers and ensuring common teaching standards for all teachers. Tuvalu teachers, at present, can enrol at the USP Tuvalu campus taking the Bachelor of Education programme through online mode until second year, and then they will still need to move to Fiji to the USP's main campus to complete their degree programme. Other teachers are often sent to Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati and Solomon Islands for teacher training.

Priority issues

Curriculum relevance

The Tuvaluan culture is one of the more resilient Polynesian cultures with strong ties to their language, their way of life and use of traditional governance systems in contemporary governance. However, the Tuvaluan world view is not evident in their curriculum nor in the way that Tuvaluan children are taught at schools. With a range of curriculum, Fiji Junior Certificate, Cambridge Curriculum, SPBEA, Tuvalu and others, being offered from ECE to secondary school, there is no sense of alignment nor is there coherency in a student's learning journey. Added to this is the number of examinations that students go through, from the National secondary school entrance examination to the Fiji Junior Certificate, the Tuvalu School Certificate, the SPBEA Form 6 and the Cambridge assessments, all are taxing on students' learning journey. Consequently, there is a growing number of students, mainly boys who are pushed out of the education system as they progress to senior secondary school.

It is not just the irrelevancy in the curriculum that is pushing Tuvaluan students out of school, it is also the quality of teachers and the lack of resources to provide students with an education that is relevant to their world. Limited budget and lack of access to teacher professional development programmes both contribute to the challenge of providing an education that is relevant in Tuvalu.

ESD

Tuvalu is one of the smallest island states in the region and unfortunately, one of the Pacific islands that is most affected by the global climate change. The average height of atolls is less than 2 metres above sea level and with climate change, Tuvalu faces several challenges, including coastal erosion, less rainfall and

prolonged droughts, decreasing fisheries population and Pulaka pit salination as a result of saltwater. The issue of adaptation is addressed at government level, with efforts to work together with the local governance Kaupule and other stakeholders. However, the education system's curriculum remains far from addressing issues of climate change education and disaster risk management.

The impact of climate change on Tuvalu is similar to other Pacific nations that include Kiribati, Marshall Islands and Federated States of Micronesia. The very real threat to the livelihoods and future of these island states pushes the idea of ESD to its very core – an education for survival. For Tuvalu and other similar states, ESD is about the survival of the people and the culture, heritage and language that they are endowed with. The prospects of relocation and becoming environmental refugees are and will be a reality not only for Tuvalu but also for most other low-lying atoll countries in the region. An education system that is relevant for Tuvalu is one that prepares their people for survival in a changing climate.

Conclusion

The issue of quality for the region and specifically for Polynesian states is really an issue of relevancy. The search for quality, therefore, is all too often a search in the wrong places, heading in the wrong direction and missing what quality is really about in our region. All too often, the discourse over quality education in the region focuses on examination marks, number of students pushed out of the system, quality of teachers, but never really on the relevancy of the total system to the student's way of life and context.

The study of Cook Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu, has shown a story that is repeated in all other Polynesian states, that of searching for quality. The search for quality in the Polynesian states is often against the context of a country heavily influenced by a more developed nation, in the case of Cook Islands and Niue, it is the influence of New Zealand. Furthermore, the search for quality is also against the context of a struggling economy with evidence of hardship and challenges of earning a sustainable livelihood, such as the case of Tonga and other similar countries in the region, including Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. The case of Tuvalu demonstrates the challenge of searching for quality education in a small island states faced with threats of global climate change. Tuvalu's case is also evident in other Pacific states including Republic of the Marshall Islands, Kiribati and Federated States of Micronesia.

Given this context and the socio-economic and geographical climate, educators can easily be misled on where and how quality education may look like. To return to the region's educational vision as expressed in PEDF, there is 'quality education for all in Pacific island countries' (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, p. 5). This 'quality education' is further expressed as each Pacific person is able to make a meaningful contribution to the social, cultural and economic development of the region.

What we see from the case of Cook Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu is that access to education at ECE and primary level are near 100 per cent; however, in all three cases, the rate of school drop-out starts as early as 14 and accelerates by senior secondary school level. Evident in all three countries is the large pool of students who are retained at senior secondary school level to pass numerous external examinations. It is interesting to see that in all three countries, as students' progress to senior level, the influence of other curriculum takes a stronger hold, as in the New Zealand certificate, the Fiji certificate, the SPBEA regional certificate and the Cambridge programme. However, also evident in all three countries is the increasing number of unemployed youth.

The effort to incorporate TVET programmes into secondary education is also evident in all three countries, with the belief that this will provide an alternative pathway for students who are not succeeding with the more academic programme at senior secondary level. This is certainly a worthwhile effort, but much remains to be done to ensure that TVET programmes are tailored to the demands of the labour market for each country.

Similarly, the effort to incorporate traditional knowledge systems including indigenous languages and culture into the curriculum still remains incomplete. The pathway towards sustainable development for all three countries lies in the incorporation of traditional and contemporary knowledge systems into the curriculum, pedagogy and total school system. When students see their everyday lives reflected in the schools, they begin to be engaged, learn to critically reflect and apply their skills and knowledge. Here lies relevancy of the school system to that of the Polynesian child's world. And here, we will find quality education, when education offered is meaningful, worthwhile and useful for the Polynesian child.

Note

- 1 The PIFS is a regional body that coordinates economic, social and political development of member countries in the region that include Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia countries.

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